THE CONSTRUCTION OF 'FARM KILLINGS' IN THE *EASTERN PROVINCE HERALD*: AN IDEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE *HERALD*'S 'FARM KILLINGS' DISCOURSE (AUGUST 1998)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the ideological inflection of the 'farm killings' discourse in the *Eastern Province Herald* articles published in August 1998. 'Farm killings' is a media frame which was applied to a spate of killings of people on the country's farms since 1994. Heightened and sustained media attention on the 'farm killings' has lifted the phenomenon from the other 'run-of-the-mill' murder crimes, and located it firmly as a matter of public concern and a subject of a broad political and economic debate. In this study I investigate the media coverage of the 'farm killings' within the context of these debates.

The cultural studies approach to the study of the media provides a fruitful theoretical framework within which this study is located. The ideological examination of the articles is done using the critical linguistics method - a brand of reflexive, interpretative style of analysis which enables a sustained examination of media texts within their social, cultural and historical context.

This study's conclusions pose a challenge to the 'Fourth Estate' role often claimed for the media. In particular, it denies that the *Herald* objectively, fairly and truthfully reflected the experience on the farms during the period of this study. Its main finding is that the newspaper instead, constructed a particular understanding of the killings characterised by subtle racism, bias and partiality.

Acknowledgements.

Chapter 1

An Introduction to the Study

1. Introduction

> What most major newspapers are attempting to do, surely, is to *reflect* events
> in the country and to *inform* their readers. (emphasis added) (*Eastern
> Province Herald'*s editorial 15/1/1992)

While this quote has been abstracted from the context of its articulation, it does capture

the pristine, untainted role claimed for the media as the 'Fourth Estate' of society. If this

claim was indeed the case, there would not be a need for a study of this nature. This study

deems it not only relevant, but also necessary to ask:

- Do the media simply *reflect* society to itself as a mirror does?

- Do they simply *inform* their readers without any attempt at influencing the way

  represented issues are understood?

These are two broad questions which underpin this study. By examining the construction

of the 'farm killings' discourse in the *Eastern Province Herald* stories (an Eastern Cape

provincial daily hereafter simply called the *Herald*), this study challenges the notion of a

reflective, detached and, disinterested role wherein, it is often claimed, the media report

the 'truth' accurately, impartially, objectively and fairly (Windshuttle 1997).

A sustained media focus on what became known in newspaper articles as 'farm

killings' dates back to 1994. Early in 1998, a major national weekly, the *Sunday Times*

(24/1/1999), reported that "farm killings" had become a commonplace with more than

"550 farmers killed since 1994." The term 'farm killings' provided a catchy headline

carried conspicuously by newspapers throughout the country. At provincial level, the

Herald carried 51 articles, including four editorials, on the subject of 'farm killings' in

August 1998 alone [1]. In one of the four editorials on the subject of the 'farm killings', headlined, 'National Crisis', the paper commented that, "the future of farming in South Africa is at stake… we need our farmers…" (*Herald* 4.8.1998). For the newspapers, at least, a 'crisis' of national proportions was a 'reality'.

However, several key political players in the country harboured reservations about the situation. Eastern Cape Province Premier, M. Stofile, for instance, accused the provincial newspapers of reporting "differently" about white and black victims of crime (*Daily Dispatch* 13/2/1999). In the report, Stofile said while the news about farmers' killings was reported widely, the media turned "…a blind eye on racism committed by farmers against black farm labourers." This opinion is echoed in Berger's (1997) earlier statement that pre-1994 reporting "…reflected – and contributed to – a climate where black lives were cheap…, [and where] the liberal press operated in, and took its cues from, the prevailing white landscape." After five years of progressive political change, Stofile's observation, if correct, seems to suggest that not much has changed in newspaper reportage.

There is a clear conflict between these latter claims and the claim by the *Herald* cited at the beginning of this introductory section. How do we understand newspaper reportage? How can a study of the 'farm killings' contribute to this understanding? Is it by counting the number of stories on black experience alongside similar stories on whites and measuring their length? The choice of an appropriate methodology is a crucial consideration if we are to constructively engage the media on the basis of the *Herald*'s, Stofile's and Berger's claims expressed above. The main purpose of a methodology, following Neuman (1997), is to make social science 'scientific'. A useful guiding

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[1] Information obtained from preliminary research of the newspaper's crime files (11/05//1999).

principle in deciding on a particular methodology, Tuchman (1995) argues, is first to consider the question one wants to answer. This study is about understanding the journalistic practice in relation to the claims made here.

The claims, by Stofile and Berger (1997), relate to issues of 'social justice' (discrimination in reportage) and thus point this study towards the critical approach to the study of communication (Daryll-Slack & Allor 1983). The connection between social justice and critical research is discussed in chapter three. Within the critical approach, the cultural studies perspective will be used as the theoretical framework for this study. As a key area of media studies, cultural studies will be used to focus this study on the way in which 'farm killings' became a particular representation of an area of crime reporting. The insights of this perspective enable useful theoretical tools that could be put to use in trying to understand the practice of journalism. It is, in turn, on the basis of this understanding that we can fruitfully and authoritatively evaluate the performance of the media against the charges levelled against it. Such knowledge is also important as "media are important shapers of our perceptions and ideas" (Masterman 1985:3). In other words, social learning is not limited to direct personal experience but is media-mediated and this mediated experience accounts for much of the stereotypic conceptions we have of numerous social groups (Gandy 1998). These assertions seem to indicate not only the importance, but also the power and influence that the media have over us. Hall (1995) attributes this influence to an 'ideological' claim of media independence from economic and political manipulation – the claim of fairness, impartiality and objectivity. Once again, posing a challenge to this claim of 'independence' is fundamental to this study.

For various reasons, crime reportage provides a useful means for an ideological examination of media processes. First, besides instilling fear, crime can be seen as an index of the disintegration of the social 'order', a politically strategic issue (Hall et al 1981). Secondly, the media are the only vehicle which provide most of us with the 'most complete and detailed' portrait of crime reality available (Chibnall 1981). Thirdly, Chibnall (1977) argues, nowhere else, other than in crime news, are the limits of newspaper values such as neutrality, objectivity and balance, revealed with more clarity. A combination of these reasons assigns more significance to an examination of the media construction of crime news. This is what 'farm killings' were – a representation of murder.

The most significant work which engages media representation of crime is by Hall et al (1981), titled 'Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order'. Thematic issues in the book include how the 'labelling' of a crime phenomenon can help dissociate crime from its more fundamental causes; the reliance of the press on 'institutional sources' for crime news, the repression of competing, 'non-consensus' views on crime, as well as the ideological nature of news values. These positions inform this study. Most of the supporting evidence, however, like the original work, comes from outside of South Africa (see Palitz et al 1982; Fishman 1981; Chibnall 1981; Knight & Dean 1982). One notable exception is by Oosthuizen (1994). The latter's focus is, however, limited to the media's tendency to report official versions of crime news with an emphasis on the legal and administrative requirements. It provides a descriptive version of the media practice within a defined historical juncture and is lacking in insight into the ideological significance of the police-media relationship.

In examining the construction of the 'farm killings' discourse in the *Herald's* news articles, this study aims to look particularly at the ideological significance of its construction. It makes use of techniques drawn from critical linguistics which enable a critical analysis of news construction to identify their ideological inflection (Fowler 1991:5). Several key questions will be raised.

- How was the 'farm killings' discourse constructed?

- What is the ideological significance of this construction?

- Who (i.e. the general categories of participants) featured in the discourse?

- How is participation in the discourse by the different players structured?

- What themes and interpretations received emphasis?

- Is there 'competition' between the interpretations/positions included?

- What treatment is given to 'competing' positions/interpretations?

- What is the significance of the construction of the reports in the social situation of the country?

These are some of the broad questions which my study will attempt to address in the analysis of the 'farm killings' discourse.

This study is divided into three main parts. The first is a sociological focus on the country's press which seeks to provide a background to this study. Here I shall look broadly at the nature, development and behaviour of the country's media from the 19th century to the late 1990s. An attempt is also made to locate the *Herald* within that history and operation. Following that, the cultural studies perspective within which this study is conducted will be outlined. Of importance in that outline is a discussion of a conceptual repertoire and insights which the perspective makes available and on which this study

draws. The third and final part will be the analysis of selected articles from the *Herald*.

As indicated above, the news reports on 'farm killings' span several years. Without

undermining the scientific requirement of rigour, the research period will be delimited to

suit the scope of this study. A total of 37 news articles and four editorials will be analysed

as the main thesis of this study. The next chapter seeks to lay the foundation for this study

by providing a perspective on the sociology of the South African Press.

Chapter 2

A Brief Overview of the Sociology of the SA Press

1. A Perspective of the Sociology of the South African Press

This chapter aims to provide a perspective on the development, nature and character of the South African Press from the 19th century up to the 1990s. Special reference will be made to key defining factors and moments which influenced this development i.e. interlocking political, social, economic and ideological dynamics which shaped the country's press and which in turn, were partly shaped by it. This historical overview aims to contextualise the operation of the country's media and thus assist the understanding of both the objective and methodological approach of this study. A fruitful way to achieve this purpose is through a historical reflection which locates the development of the press within developments in the wider society, since the two factors were, and remain, so closely intertwined. To do this, the following discussion is divided into two main areas, namely: the press and the divisions in the country, and the second part attempts to 'locate' the *Herald* within the picture painted by the first part. I begin with a precursory overview of the nature and characteristics of the country's society to usher in the historical reflection mentioned above.

1.1 The Press in a divided society

South Africa has a long history of racial domination, segregation and subjugation accompanied by a sustained struggle against this domination (Sachs 1975). It is a complexly divided, multiracial society suffused with racism, a 'strange society', with its white affluence and black poverty (Hachten & Giffard 1984). As I argue below, the

development of the South African press never escaped the country's turbulent history, divisions and character: being the prominent institution that it always has been, these factors had a profound impact on the moulding of the press for more than a century (Jackson 1993). The following section is an overview of the intricate political, professional, legal, economic, social and ideological challenges which buffeted South African society and the accompanying adjustments and adaptations by the press.

1.2 The Nature of the Press in a divided society

The South African press did not serve as mere passive reflectors or mirrors of its society, but has had countless effects on the political, social, economic and ideological climate, while it took on some characteristics of this society (Jackson 1993). This constitutes the theme of this section.

Historically, Hachten and Giffard (1984) argue, various groups in South Africa have utilised the press to express political aspirations. The political definition of these groups was inherently racist - 'European' or 'non-European'; 'white or 'black' - predicated on racial domination of the latter groups. This racist landscape and the concomitant racism permeated the press and patterned its development and operation in various crucial ways. In other words, the very divisions in the press were symptomatic of the racism of the state. This racism was reflected in three distinct concepts: the Afrikaans Press, the English Press and the 'Black Press', coexisting uncomfortably in the country. Potter (1975) outlines the three categories and their raison d'être as follows:

- The *African Press* continually agitated for the end of white domination.

- The *English Press* provided an unofficial 'opposition' (but stands accused of being itself a part of the white power structure).

- The *Afrikaans Press* existed as an instrument of the former Nationalist Party (NP) government's political aspirations.

While these are useful categories to facilitate a discussion, a caveat is in order here. This categorisation borders on an essentialist approach which assumes homogeneity, and could therefore be misleading. What falls within each of the categories cannot be viewed as a monolithic group of undifferentiated agencies for conservatism or agitation. Hence these categories are useful only to the extent that they are viewed to reflect preponderant tendencies in reportage.

The structure of the following overview engages the development of the press in a peculiar duality, i.e. the 'White' Press, which subsumes both the English and the Afrikaans Press, and the 'Black' Press, which includes African, Indian and Coloured journalistic initiatives. There are two key reasons for this approach, first, as the discussion attempts to demonstrate, what brought the English and the Afrikaans Press together outweighed what separated them. Secondly, such an approach enables a more constructive engagement with the racist foundation of the country's press, which accounts for its polarisation on the basis of 'race' in the first place.

1.2.1 The 'White Press'

The development of the English Press predates its Afrikaans counterpart by many years. The first English paper independent of government control, the *South African Commercial Advertiser,* was launched in 1824 (Switzer & Switzer 1978). Founded on a

segregationist legacy laid by CJ Rhodes and Paul Kruger, among others, there has always been a close association between the English Press and big business, particularly the mining concerns in South Africa (Beinart 1994). The English tribe in the country has always been divided on regional, class and ethnic lines, and never developed effective organisations to advance their political interests, their main concern being their purely economic interests (Butler 1975). This had a far-reaching influence on the operation of the English Press – known as the liberal press – due to its 'critical' capacity. Historically, the English Press has been assertive, and has done careful investigative, as well as vituperative, muckraking work (Rotberg 1981). This 'critical' capacity however, needs to be put into perspective. Between the two world wars, while colonialism was 'fashionable' and white domination 'unproblematic', it was not legalised (van Zyl Slabbert 1989). Criticising domination at this time was therefore not as 'precarious' and risky as it became after the World War II in South Africa. The ascendancy of the Afrikaners to power in 1948 and their introduction of the policy of Apartheid negated the traditional 'critical' character of the English Press in various ways.

1.2.1.1 Apartheid is legalised (1948 - 1989)

The NP came to power in 1948 on an Afrikaner nationalism card, and D.F. Malan began immediately to codify and extend South Africa's racial segregation (Schrire 1994). Thereafter apartheid became so dominant a feature of life over the next 40 years that it must be intrinsic to a description and understanding of this period (Beinart 1994). An array of processes (social, legal, economic, political, ideological) and events were set in motion which were to profoundly change the society and all its systems. The press was not immune to these forces.

Several authors (van Zyl Slabbert 1989; Beinart 1994; Giliomee 1994; Olivier 1994) have documented the impact of apartheid at length, and the following exposition draws on their arguments. Apartheid separated and polarised black and white communities more effectively than segregation had done beforehand. It brought about an entrenched privilege for whites and structural deprivation for blacks. The era soon came to be characterised by a multiplicity of stories of dispossession, forced movement, treks and 'crying for land'. For the next decades the Afrikaners became the core constituency of government, and it was they who would become the main beneficiaries of state privilege and protection. Other whites were, nevertheless not insignificant in the political equation. White unity was seen to be important for economic growth, and this worked to anchor the state in a consolidated white community. State power came to be dominated by a group of whites who used the term 'nation' narrowly to mean an ethnically defined minority (white) segment of the population.

> "Let me be very clear about this, when I talk of the nation, I talk of the white people of South Africa" (former President Verwoerd quoted in Giliomee 1994)

The national anthem and flag became exclusive symbols of the 'white nation' and pseudo-states for blacks were created to provide a material and ideological backing for this conception. As I attempt to demonstrate below, these developments were paralleled by similar developments in the 'White Press'. The established 'White Press' throughout its history, has been owned and controlled by whites, concerned almost exclusively with the political, economic and social life of people described by the state as white, and consumed mainly by them for most of its two-hundred-year history (Switzer 1997).

Apartheid became a combination of paternalism and a peculiar rationalisation of racial discrimination based on a perceived 'inferiority' of blacks. Even if biological racism was not explicitly part of the Nationalist's rhetoric, its crude assumptions suffused everyday white language. For example, Giliomee (1994) cites an instance where former President B.J. Voster was asked by a delegate at an NP congress to reconsider the law of assault 'because farm labourers have become too easily inclined to lay a charge if their employees had given them *a little slap*'.

The system brought about a number of consequences in addition to heightened racial prejudice, poverty, a formidable legislative programme, use of ethnic power for economic gain and overtones of patriarchal domination. The existence of blacks in South Africa as a 'threat' to whites (*swart gevaar*) was exploited for political gain. 'Blackness' came to signify danger – a '*gevaar*'. A variation of '*swart gevaar*' politics entailed the "Look at what happened to whites up north" saying - making unfavourable comparisons with the lot of white minorities in transitional and post-colonial situations. The coverage of the effects of transition on white lifestyles contributed to the feeling of trauma when fundamental reform was mentioned. "Nothing is calculated to stiffen white resistance to change and promote siege politics more than this to become the common perception that white South Africans have of the attitude of others to their presence in the land" (van Zyl Slabbert 1989: 53). To achieve this resistance, the Press became of strategic importance, as evidenced by the government's relentless efforts at subduing and enticing it through both coercion and persuasion. I develop this point further below.

1.2.1.2 The 'White Press' and Apartheid

The period immediately before and after 1948 was a watershed one for the press in the country as the retention of power by the Afrikaner tribe was to be seen as a matter of life and death for Afrikanerdom (Olivier 1994). It was during this period that the Afrikaans Press came into being as 'political agents' – instruments to bring the Afrikaners to political domination (Hachten and Giffard 1984). In other words, most major Afrikaans newspapers were founded with the aim of propagating the views of various precursors and branches of the NP and they still remain closely tied to the cultural and political life of the Afrikaners (Tomaselli et al 1987). The Afrikaans Press saw it as its duty to defend the state ('nation') (Giliomee 1994).

As I argue in the discussion of the 'Black Press' below, a majority of the Black Protest Press had closed down or had been taken over by white commercial interests in the 1930s, and thus its presence during the 1940s had been significantly weakened (Switzer 1997). As a result, the English language newspapers took to articulating black aspirations in the absence of a 'truly independent 'Black Press'', thus attracting the attention of the government (Hachten & Giffard 1984; Tomaselli et al 1987). It was due to this stance that the English Press came to be seen as an 'opposition' press.

However, several criticisms have been made of the 'English Press' as an 'opposition press'. Tomaselli et al (1987) for example, argue that apartheid was an ideology as well as a huge capitalist enterprise. Due to serious structural limitations – being owned by white capital and therefore having vested interests in maintaining the capitalist system – the English Press was hamstrung in its quest for impartiality. It could not probe structural causes of poverty and treated the plight of the destitute blacks in a humanist, piecemeal fashion (Tomaselli et al 1987). It is for this reason that the English

Press continued to be seen in black circles as part of the establishment – the white capitalist system (Hachten & Giffard 1984). Another reason why the English Press could not be seen as 'oppositional', is due to their 'self-serving' self censorship which was a response to legislation aimed at containing popular resistance against the state. A combination of far reaching legislation, self-censorship and agreements between the National Press Union (NPU) – formed by Afrikaans and English Press companies in the 1950s to forestall statutory control of the press - and the state, produced an environment in which the state not only succeeded in manipulating and controlling information, but also broadly eroded the fundamental freedoms of the press (Rotberg 1981; UNESCO report 1972). Lastly, Giliomee (1994) argues, the reconciliatory tone adopted by the NP towards the English succeeded in winning over to its fold a considerable percentage of them. It follows, therefore, that the English 'converts' understood the apartheid project from the point of view of the NP. These factors had serious implications for the nature of criticism the English Press could express.

The general drift of the argument below is that the English press' support, by commission or omission, for the capitalist order facilitated by apartheid, is indicative not of a 'conspiracy', but an 'agreement', a 'consensus' between itself, the Afrikaans Press and the majority of the white readers (voters) about the orderliness and acceptability of the asymmetrical economic and power relations entrenched by that order. Hence, as Tomaselli et al (1987) contend, the government's opposition to the English language newspapers has to be seen as a secondary consequence of the suppression of black opposition to apartheid.

The suppression of the critical press culminated in a dramatic blanket shut down of all opposition publications in the early 1960s, following the Sharpeville massacre. While the main target of the shut down was the black political organisations and their publications, there were English publications that were affected (UNESCO Report 1972). Of all the English Press which criticised the government policy, only one survived in 1965, the *Contact*, which was also subsequently discontinued after sustained harassment by state agents (UNESCO Report 1972). Henceforth the criticism of the English Press had been blunted further. No 'established 'publication would take the same risks as the banned 'protest' papers in identifying with particular non-participative extra-parliamentary groups (van Zyl Slabbert 1989). Claims by critics about the nature of the 'opposition' of the English Press is enlightening. Switzer (1997), for example, argues that these papers:

- focused on 'safe' anti-apartheid news stories and on personalities and events rather than issues, ignoring the conditions and contexts in which these stories took place

- practised widespread self-censorship

- did nothing to de-racialise and democratise themselves

- omitted, trivialised or downplayed news that might threaten the economic and political interests of their largely white, English speaking readership in much the same way as white Afrikaans Press

    The liberal press… [had] been reduced to insecurity and near impotence, and the great English dailies impeded from discovering and reporting the worst evils of apartheid and under great pressure to refrain from the fundamental criticisms of government. (Thompson quoted in Rotberg 1981: 27).

This pattern continued into the 1980s, resulting in an inadequate coverage of several disastrous events and issues, including the causes and the police handling of the 1976 uprisings, the death of Steve Biko, and the activities of the Black Consciousness movement (BCM).

There were ideological dimensions in the behaviour of the English Press in addition to the legal proscription and economic constraints. One example is P.W. Botha's 'Total Onslaught' framework which became standard propaganda fare for all government controlled and supporting media in the 1980s (van Zyl Slabbert 1989). There were managers and editors of the 'opposition press' (English Press) who, although they felt strongly about the freedom of the press, rule of law etc, were not that averse to accepting 'the reality' of the 'Total Onslaught' and the need for a 'Total Strategy' (van Zyl Slabbert 1989). Further, a great bulk of English speakers remained solidly opposed to the kind of majority rule the African National Congress (ANC) envisaged (Giliomee 1994). What they wanted, Giliomee (1994) argues, was a pro-capitalist state which steadily absorbed blacks as political managers while safeguarding 'stability', and to them the NP still seemed essential to manage this process. This attitude characterised the 'reality' that the English Press mediated, and which its readers expected and supported.

In the meantime the Afrikaans Press pandered to Botha's whims. Giliomee (1994) argues that Botha's notorious temper was sufficient to muzzle any criticism of him by the Afrikaans Press. The 1980s saw the emergence of what was known as the 'alternative press', supporting the black political cause, the declaration of the state of emergency and increased pressure for change. It was during this period that Tom Vosloo, (then) editor of *Beeld,* remarked: "The struggle had become a matter of conflict between white and black nationalism in which the press was being employed by both parties. It is *us* or *them*" (my italics) (Giliomee 1994).

The 'oligopolistic' control of the 'White Press' by Afrikaans and English companies (Argus Newspapers – now Independent Newspapers; Times Media Ltd;

Perskor; Nasionale Pers and Caxton) continued into the 1990s. The country's politics changed dramatically when former President FW de Klerk unbanned all political organisations and announced an imminent dismantling of apartheid. Since the 1994 democratic election, some shifts have occurred in the ownership and control of the press, marked by an 'erosion' of white control and its replacement by black control, for example the *Sowetan* and *City Press* (Emdon 1998).

Alongside this chronology of developments, the 'Black Press' existed, under the influence of a myriad of social, political, economic and ideological processes and events. The next section captures the most salient of these, from the viewpoint of this study.

1.2.2 The 'Black Press'

In keeping with the earlier caveat, the term 'Black Press' could be misleading. This category does not *only* entail newspapers owned by blacks, written in an African language, nor even read exclusively by blacks. The concept is used here to refer to the press which sought to interpret South Africa's subordinated black communities both to themselves and to the world since the 1860s (Switzer 1997). Thus, included within the term are various newspapers and publications aimed at African, Coloured, and Indian communities. The following discussion of the 'Black Press' is structured according to five developmental 'phases' identified by Switzer & Switzer (1978) as: the Early Missionary Press (1830 – 1880s); the Independent Protest Press (1880s – 1920s); the Early Resistance Press (1930s – 1960s); the Later Resistance Press (1970s – 1980s) and the Alternative Press phase of the 1980s to the late 1990s.

Switzer (1997) argues that publications intended for Africans were produced from the beginning of the European mission entreprise in the early 19th century to cater for African converts, hence the 'Missionary phase' reference. The 1880s saw the start of Independent Protest Press. Henceforth, publications independent of European missionary control were produced by the African Christian community heralding the establishment of Indian and Coloured publications in the early 1900s (Switzer 1997). Individual publications within these sub-categories were many and diverse and space precludes a discussion of each. I shall therefore limit the focus to those important factors and issues which were common to their development.

While these papers dealt with a variety of subjects from health to teaching, their raison d'être was politics: their establishment coincided with significant political developments i.e. heightened segregationist direction in white politics, promulgation of the Natives Act, Terms of Union etc. (Beinart 1994). At this stage, black opposition to white segregationist tendencies was largely passive, localised, fragmented and on several occasions met with swift and brutal suppression (Beinart 1994). Early African Nationalism, Beinart (1994) contends, retained a liberal belief in multiracial civilisation and citizenship in South Africa. Until the late 1920s the 'Black Press' thrived on extremely fragile foundations which restricted its growth during this period. These included: the denial of access to African journalists to political and public affairs news, illiteracy, cultural, class, ethnic divisions and the orientation of the readership, lack of advertising revenue and harassment (Switzer & Switzer 1978).

The late 1920s saw the intensification of the 'struggle' and its assumption of ideological overtones influenced by black American ideas, thereby heralding the entry of

the Early Resistance Press (Beinart 1994). At the same time, white financial interests

were becoming aware of the 'Black Press' business potential and were fearful of its

political influence (Switzer & Switzer 1978). The depression and repression of the 1930s

and the retribalisation of Africans exerted a huge financial pressure on African political

publications (Switzer 1997). This coincided with the efforts of economic organisations

(*Volkkapitalisme*) designed to enlarge the Afrikaner stake in the economy (Beinart 1994).

These factors placed the 'Black Press' at the mercy of big capital. The growth of the

African urban population and literacy saw white concerns buying up independent African

newspapers and establishing other publications aimed at Africans, thereby precipitating

the collapse of the 'Black Press' under the competition from white owned commercial

papers (Switzer 1997). From 1933 onwards, a major portion of newspapers designed for

Africans were controlled by persons linked to the South African Mining industry or the

Afrikaanse Pers (UNESCO Report 1972). The Report also observed that the Africans

who worked for these 'apolitical' publications had no say in policy issues. Switzer &

Switzer (1978) have looked at how the 'reluctant' writers and owners of the traditional

Protest Press were made to conform to corporate concerns as the 'Black Press' was

transformed into a commercial mass medium of communication. Their findings in this

regard can be summarised as follows:

- Black news writing began to conform to the more prosaic, 'non-partisan, objective' prose style of modern conventional journalism.

- News and opinion were separated, in theory, and stories began to effect a standardised, factual mode of writing focussing on event-oriented, rather than issue-oriented news.

- The agenda of black news was defined by whites who also determined the suitability of news for blacks

- 'Gee-whiz' journalism based on 'sex-crime-sport' formula overwhelmed the traditional reluctance of the protest press to indulge in 'entertainment' news and bridged the gap in forging mass, popular 'Black Press'.

- Few, if any, white owned Black newspapers remained ideologically committed. Anything 'calculated to inflame the native mind and lead to general discontent at their lot' was seen to be taboo.

- English was a favoured medium of communication for black publications.

These developments stifled the political role of the 'Black Press' and almost resulted in a political vacuum between 1930 and 1950. However, several socialist journals filled this 'vacuum' alongside a new generation of financially struggling publications which supported the black political cause after the 1880 – 1920s publications had folded up (Switzer & Switzer 1978). These continued until the 1960s 'shut down' period. Henceforth, all the socialist publications and what was left of Protest Press and their supporting organisations were banned. Subsequently, government publications aimed at promoting apartheid and 'apolitical' commercial publications by Afrikaans and English companies continued to operate (Switzer & Switzer 1978).

Press companies like all large companies, are propelled by growing capital requirements and by the shareholder demands for larger profits and efficiency. The 1970s saw the hitherto, monolithic 'White Press' struggle to acquire a multi-racial image responding to economic concerns (Switzer & Switzer 1978). Black readership was growing and the 'township' editions in both English and Afrikaans Press were proving a success in drawing black readers to white newspapers (Switzer & Switzer 1978).

The Later Resistance Press came and went during the 1970s. This is the period when the BCM became active and started its publications. These, however, were short-lived and were banned in 1977. From then, the only permitted alternatives for the 'Black

Press', were publications put under the aegis of the various 'homelands' and 'non-political' community press which was largely compatible, ideologically, with apartheid (Switzer & Switzer 1978).

The 1980s saw the establishment of foreign-funded newspapers known as 'Alternative Press', offering an alternative to the Afrikaans and English Press. Included within this concept of the press were the newspaper which identified with the 'struggle' to end white rule (Tomaselli et al 1987). It was during this period that widespread detentions were effected and a state of emergency, with strict media restrictions, was declared. It was also during this period that white South Africans (including newspaper editors) went to meet with the then banned ANC in Dakar. This was also to be the last decade for exclusive white politics.

In the 1990s when de Klerk took over, profound changes followed including the unbanning of political organisations and the beginning of the end of apartheid. Of the six major newspapers – *New African, Vrye Weekblad, South, New Nation, UmAfrika* and the *Weekly Mail* (now *Mail and Guardian*) - that belonged to the politically inspired 'Alternative Press', only the latter two titles survive. Several factors militate against the emergence of a new 'Black Press'. Among these factors are: the market entry costs, low advertising costs because of an impoverished readership, as well as the 'gulfs' between people created by apartheid (Emdon 1998).

These factors, notwithstanding, major transformations have occurred in the Press environment following since 1994. These have been mentioned above. One crucial question I need to introduce at this point is: did the end of legalised racism ushered in by the 1994 democratic elections bring about a change in the traditional way the 'white

press' mediates 'reality'? This question arises against the backdrop of Berger's (1997) assertion in chapter one, that prior to 1994, routine reporting reflected, and contributed to, a climate where black lives were cheap and where the liberal press operated in, and took its cues from, the prevailing white landscape. The foregoing discussion of the sociology of the country's press appears to lend credence to this claim. The next section attempts to locate the *Herald* within the scheme of things and patterns developed by that discussion.

1.3 An observation - locating the *Herald.*

The above discussion looks at the operation of the press within a racially defined country. A recapitulation shows that, historically, the 'White Press' mediated a peculiar 'reality' to the public, resonant with the social order predicated on white capitalism and racial domination. This was effected by omitting, trivialising and downplaying news that might threaten the economic and political interests of a largely white readership.

The press situation in the country and its outcomes could be viewed from the perspective of three broad interlocking frameworks: the *legal*, *economic* and the *ideological*. Below, these three are briefly revisited with an emphasis on the latter as *the* framework adopted for analysis in this study. The first two frameworks are, however, not irrelevant. For an ideological analysis to be effective, as I shall argue later, the economic and political context of its execution is indispensable. A brief look at these frameworks also attempts to link them with the situation at the *Herald*.

1.3.1 The legal framework

It is apparent from the above discussion that apartheid containment of the press in South Africa has been crudely coercive and manipulative. The press consistently operated in an environment fraught with administrative and legal risks and inhibitions which threatened, silenced and intimidated it. More than 100 laws were enacted to restrict the press between 1948 and 1989 (Louw 1990). I have also referred to how the English Press failed to democratise and de-racialise itself. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report alleges that the mainstream newspapers reacted to legal curbs by following a policy of appeasement (http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/commissions/1998/trc/4chap6.htm;). It also claims that an 'apartheid mindset' subsists in many major media institutions in the country. The report is, however, drawn from uncorroborated information submitted as evidence to the TRC and should be read with caution. After apartheid was officially dismantled in 1994, freedom of expression was enshrined in the constitution. A policy framework for the advancement of blacks (Affirmative Action policy, Employment Equity Act) was instituted. This is the basis for the present legal environment the *Herald* operates in. However, in spite of the claim by the newspaper's Acting Paymaster, Mureedah Abrahams, that since 1994 "the employment of blacks is picking up," the current demographics[2] of the newspaper's employee structure remains reminiscent of the past. The number of white employees accounts for more than 80 percent of the paper's total work force. Of this total, white males outnumber their female counterparts by 2:1. There are ten black employees, of which seven are males, two females and one Coloured. It is important to note that these statistics are for the total workforce, from the lowest to

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[2] Information received in a telephone interview with the *Herald*'s Acting Paymaster Mureedah Abrahams, on 06 March 2000.

the highest echelons in the paper's employee structure. The significance of this is that not all of the ten black employees are reporters, thereby further diminishing the number of black employees in the newsroom.

1.3.2 The economic frame work

The discussion above also refers to the economic hardships faced by blacks, massive empowerment of the Afrikaners and the economic success of the English. It also mentions the growing capital requirements of large companies. Here I look at these issues from a different angle: the implications of the *real need* for business to generate profits.

Newspapers have to attract adequate advertising revenue to survive. Dependency on advertising challenges the press' ideological claim to being a disinterested agency reflecting society to itself, to providing the 'marketplace of ideas'. This is so because

> …wealthy readers – especially if they control corporate wealth as well as private wealth for their own use – count for more in the calculations of advertisers than do readers on ordinary low incomes: understandably enough, because they command more purchasing power. So advertisers will pay more to reach a body of wealthy readers than to reach the same number of poorer readers; so in turn newspapers aimed at the top levels of the newspaper-reading public can, and usually do, charge higher advertising rates per head of their readership than newspapers addressed to less prosperous readers; and so a paper for 'top people' can survive with a smaller circulation than a paper for solid citizens of suburbia, while a paper directed principally to wage earners and the poor needs very large sales if advertisers are to be persuaded to buy space on a sufficient scale to keep revenue in line with costs. (Westergaard 1987 102 – 3)

It follows that information (products) that appeals to wealthy readers takes precedence over information relevant to poorer sectors. The historical deprivation of blacks and the sustained privilege for whites racialises market stratification in the country with few blacks considered to have the spending power of middle or upper stratum whites

(Tomaselli et al 1987). A readership survey[3] conducted in the six months immediately before the analysis period of this study shows that, of the 44 000 daily readers of the *Herald* during that time, more than 63 percent were white English and Afrikaans speakers, and more than 65 percent of the readers are metropolitan residents. A further breakdown indicates that a majority of these readers is above fifty years old, belongs to the top three categories of economic stratification and earns more than R4 000 a month. The correspondence between these statistics and the theme of the discussion of the English Press seem to indicate a deep sedimentation of the legacy of apartheid in the *Herald*'s structure and distribution. However, it would be too deterministic and essentialist to extrapolate the nature of the 'reality' the newspaper mediates, solely from the above information, hence the third framework – the ideological framework.

1.3.3   The ideological framework

While not as readily observable as the other two, this framework is crucial in the examination of the mediation of 'reality' and the exercise of domination in society. It is central to this study and will be explicated more in the next chapter. Here the term 'ideology' is introduced in line with the purpose of this section. Switzer's (1997) argument makes this purpose clearer. He says that throughout its two hundred years history, the established 'White Press' has been owned and controlled by whites, concerned almost exclusively with political, economic and social life of the white population, and consumed mainly by whites. The result was the marginalisation of the concerns of the poor, blacks, rural workers, and most of those outside the economic mainstream, as well as a hostility to interpretations outside the preferred discourse

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[3] These statistics are drawn from the South African All Media and Products Survey of January – July 1998.

(Tomaselli et al 1987). Olivier (1994) for example, observes how the increase in violence and serious crime – to a considerable extent a function of massive unemployment and the bad state of the economy – contributed strongly to an unsympathetic attitude by many whites towards blacks *generally* (emphasis added). Much of the information about, and thus understanding of, violence and crime is obtained through the media (Chibnall 1981). It can therefore, be argued that this attitude on the part of 'many whites' was facilitated by the manner in which crime and violence were mediated by the 'White Press'. This could be construed as an indictment against the claims of fairness, completeness and impartiality by the press. Representation of crime, and thus its understanding as an issue, is not simply a technical process but a socially located one as I argue below.

When I come later to discuss the theory of crime representation, I shall revisit and attempt to articulate more the presence of 'ideology' in crime news. Within the ideological approach to representation, an important notion is that of the power to signify events in a particular way. As Hall (1995) notes:

> A society …committed ... by the concentration of economic capital and political power to the massively unequal distribution of wealth and authority, [has] much to gain from the continuous production of popular consent to its existing structure, to the values which supported and underwrote it, and to its continuity of existence. (1995 63)

Ideology is anchored in the 'signifying practices' and their tendency to reproduce the very definitions of the situation which favour and legitimise the social order. At issue here is what Hall (1995) calls 'ideological structuration' of the messages mediated by the 'signifying agents' – the press. A careful look at these 'practices' can help determine their relationship (consistency or opposition) to their social, economic and political context. This is one of the objectives of the examination of the construction of the

Herald's 'farm killings' discourse. The assumptions and objectives of cultural studies as a theoretical framework, could enable the achievement of this and the other objectives laid out in the opening chapter of this study. The following chapter pursues this point.

Chapter 3

Theory and Methodology

1. Theoretical framework and Methodology

This study is concerned with the examination of the construction of the *Herald*'s 'farm killings' discourse. It aims to challenge the media's Fourth Estate claims and views news articles not as reflections, but as constructions of 'reality'. This chapter outlines the theoretical and methodological basis for this constructionist view. Methodology implies an overall strategy of constructing specific types of knowledge and is justified by a variety of metatheoretical assumptions (Morrow 1994). Consequently this chapter is divided into three main areas which together establish the importance of the main issues in this study. First is a discussion of this study's theoretical framework. Next is an explication of key concepts from the theoretical perspective of this study, and thirdly, is a discussion of procedure and techniques used in the gathering and analysis of data in this study.

The major questions that this study raises relate to issues of social justice – an alleged racial discrimination in reporting. Critical research, as a broad framework, offers the most suitable methodological options to examine this concern. Below is a brief look at the key commitments of the critical theory.

Theoretical Assumptions

1.1 Critical research – key epistemological commitments

It is important to note that critical research refers to a range of alternative approaches to the study of communication (Daryll-Slack & Allor 1983). Thus any simplistic attribution

of assumptions to 'critical theory' as a unified approach, may be insensitive to the diverse range of approaches within it (Daryll-Slack & Allor 1983). The following discussion looks at the key commitments of critical theory as a framework for this study.

Critical theory approaches are concerned with emancipation – they concern themselves with the study of communication as an important factor in the exercise of power (Shalin 1992; Bronner 1994). While critical research can be both empirical and rigorous, it has little time for the methods of hard science (Dryzek 1992). This qualitative element enables a proper engagement with communication processes (including symbolic constructions), to determine their effectivity in relation to the social formation (Daryll-Slack & Allor 1983). Priest (1996) argues that a qualitative approach is preferable in cases where the particular aspects of content being studied are difficult to capture in quantitative analysis schemes. Important characteristics of a qualitative study include: the openness of its interpretation, an engagement with ideology, exclusive concern with understanding rather than prediction and control, as well as tolerance of the author's insights (Ambert et al 1995).

The critical theory framework could therefore be helpful for this study, in which 'meaning' is at the centre of the investigation. For example, following Priest (1996), critical theory enables us to use media material as evidence of how some ways of thinking are socially "privileged" over others. One critical research approach – the cultural studies approach – is particularly adept in dealing with media material. The next section outlines this perspective as the theoretical perspective which informs this study and attempts to point out its relevance to this study's analytic objectives.

2. Understanding cultural studies

The complexity of 'culture' makes it difficult to define 'cultural studies' with any degree of precision (Sparks 1996). Cultural studies, thus, cannot be understood as a monolithic body of theories and methods with a discrete list of topics, but as a multiplicity of discourses and many trajectories (Hall 1992; Agger, 1992). These statements seem to suggest the eclectic and generic nature of cultural studies which cannot be sufficiently delineated in a section of this size and scope with justification. For the purpose of this study, a fruitful way to understand cultural studies is by looking at its concerns, commitments and assumptions.

2.1 Cultural studies – its commitments and assumptions

Fiske (1996) argues that cultural studies' main concern is with the generation and circulation of meanings in industrial societies. This concern is informed by peculiar epistemological assumptions which commit a researcher to a moral and political evaluation of society (Carey 1996). These assumptions imbue cultural studies with a character of a 'political movement' opposed to inequality and exploitation (Grossberg 1995). They account for its 'historical mission', which is against a retreat into academic modesty (asserting that interpretive writing is impotent and irrelevant) and claims of disinterested scholarship that protest that political commitments vitiate scholarly objectivity (Nelson 1996).

Cultural studies is essentially Marxist in the traditions of Althusser and Gramsci (Fiske 1996). These are the two theorists who offered a way of accommodating both structuralism and the history of capitalism in the twentieth century with Marxism (Fiske

1996). The following is a brief outline of the basic Marxist assumptions which underlie cultural studies following Fiske (1996):

- The belief that meanings and the making of them (culture) are indivisibly linked to social structure and can only be explained in terms of that structure and its history. Correlatively, the social structure is held in place by, among other forces, the meanings that culture produces.

- Capitalist societies are divided along class, race, gender etc. In the struggle for meaning the dominant classes attempt to 'naturalise' the meanings that serve their interests, whereas subordinate classes may resist this process in various ways.

- The attempt of the dominant classes to 'naturalise' their meanings rarely, if ever, results from a conscious intention of individual members of those classes. This is the work of an 'ideology' inscribed in the social and cultural practices of a class.

Several observations regarding the role of culture and the pervasiveness of ideology in it, can be made from these assumptions. We deal with these observations below, beginning with the view of the role of culture.

Cultural studies eschews the vulgar Marxist notion of 'false consciousness' (Fiske 1996). For cultural studies, culture *matters* and cannot simply be treated as a transparent public face of dominative capitalists (Grossberg 1995). Culture makes history and should therefore be studied for the (ideological) work that it does, rather than the ideological work that it reflects (Storey 1996). The above argument maintains that there is no single structure (economy), which stitches all of history into place and which could be used in explaining all forms of power (Grossberg 1995; Grossberg 1996).

However, while cultural studies insists that culture is not *simply* dependent on the economy, it also argues that it is neither *simply independent* of economic relationships (Turner 1992). As Grossberg (1995) argues, without a careful analysis of the broader social context of unequal power relations, avoidance of the economic due to fear of being

reductionist, 'the value of cultural studies' criticism all but disappears.' He continues, cultural studies does not deny that economic relations and practices shape in determinate ways the terrain upon which cultural practices take place, that they may even help shape the cultural agenda, but always and only do so, in part. Cultural studies conceives of culture relationally: the analysis of cultural practices (texts, discourse, rituals etc) does not constitute cultural studies unless the thing analysed is considered in terms of its competitive, reinforcing and determining relations with other objects and cultural forces (Nelson 1996). Another important feature of the anti-reductionist stance of cultural studies is that, it does not deny that people are sometimes duped, manipulated, and lied to (and believe the lies, sometimes knowing that they are lies) (Grossberg 1995). In other words, people are often complicit in their own subordination, although power often works through strategies and apparatuses of which people are totally unaware (Grossberg 1995).

Cultural studies' view of ideology is predicated on its view of the role of culture. Ideology is the central concept in cultural studies: "… the field of culture is … [seen as] a major site of ideological struggle, a terrain of 'incorporation' and 'resistance', one of the sites where hegemony is to be won or lost." (Storey 1996:4) Ideology is conceptualised, not as the contents and surface forms of ideas, but as the unconscious categories through which conditions are represented and lived (Hall 1996). In Turner's (1992) words, ideology not only produces our culture, it also produces our consciousness of ourselves and our reality, for good or ill, the world it constructs is the one we will always inhabit.

While the foregoing discussion does provide a useful framework for this project, from which useful insights could be sourced, it might help to narrow it in terms of the approach adopted for the study. At the beginning of this section, the point was made

regarding the breadth of cultural studies. To indicate this breadth, Johnson (1996)

ascribes three main models to cultural studies research: production-based research, text-

based research, and studies of lived cultures. It follows that methods for researching the

different 'moments' will differ. The various methods available for cultural studies'

research are derived from sociological, anthropological or socio-historical roots, while

others come from literary criticism, and especially traditions of literary modernism and

linguistic formalism (Johnson 1996). I shall now briefly pay attention to the 'two

dominant strands' in cultural studies, namely, *culturalism* and *structuralism*, and their

methodical preferences following Hall's (1996) delineation of these.

     The culturalist strand stands particularly opposed to the residual and merely

reflective role assigned to 'the cultural' by classical Marxism (Hall 1996). "It

conceptualises culture as interwoven with all social practices, and those practices, in turn,

as a common form of human activity: sensuous human praxis, the activity through which

men and women make history" (Hall 1996:38). It follows that ethnography is more suited

to fulfill the objectives of this strand (Hall 1996).

     It is, however, from the structuralist strand that this study draws more. Hall (1996)

argues that structuralism has largely been articulated around a concept of 'ideology':

"…in keeping with its more impeccably Marxist lineage, 'culture' does not figure so

prominently." Structuralism sees culture as the primary object of study, and approaches it

most often by way of the analysis of representative textual forms (Turner 1992). Its

emphasis is on the relative independence or effective autonomy of subjective forms and

means of signification, and a preferred method is to treat the forms abstractly, sometimes

quite formalistically, uncovering the mechanisms by which meaning is produced in

language, narrative or other kinds of sign-system (Johnson 1996). To achieve this purpose, Johnson (1996) argues, cultural products are treated as 'texts' and the point is to provide more or less definitive 'readings' of them. The 'text' is treated as a means, it is a raw material from which certain forms, e.g. 'ideological problematic', may be abstracted (Johnson 1996).

Structuralism insists that 'experience' could not be the ground – the terrain of 'the lived' – where consciousness and conditions intersected since one could only 'live' and experience ones own conditions in and through the categories, classifications and frameworks of the culture (Hall 1996). In this sense language (and other cultural meaning systems) provides the only access to reality: "thus the idea of an objective empirical 'truth' is untenable i.e. truth must always be understood in terms of how it is made, for whom, and at what time it is 'true'" (Fiske 1996: 286). Experience, therefore, is seen as the effect of the classifications of culture rather than their authenticating source, it is seen not as a reflection of the real but as an 'imaginary relation' (Hall 1996). This 'imaginary relation', in turn, serves, not simply the dominance of a ruling class over the dominated, but (through the reproduction of the relations of production, and the constitution of labour-power in a form fit for capitalist exploitation) the expanded reproduction of the mode of production itself (Hall 1996). In culture and in language, Hall (1996) argues, the subject is 'spoken by' the (unconscious) categories of culture in which s/he thinks, rather than 'speaking them'.

A structuralist approach is suited to enhance a better understanding of 'ideology' thereby facilitating an understanding of the effectivity of 'culture' for the reproduction of a particular mode of production (Hall 1996). As Hall (1996) states, its emphasis is on an

awareness of the fact that, in capitalist relations, men and women are placed and positioned in relations which constitute them as agents. He continues, the approach also allows, in the analysis, for the revelation of relationships and structures which cannot be visible to the naïve naked eye and which can neither present nor authenticate themselves.

From the foregoing discussion, it appears that cultural studies is a suitable approach in analysing the ideological inflection of texts. The discussion locates ideological concerns at the centre of a cultural studies project and this coincides with the concerns of this study – ideological analysis of the 'farm killings' discourse. It also, as Hall (1996) puts it, argues for the necessity to address urgent, and disturbing questions of society in the most rigorous way available. In this sense it enables an engagement with crucial and central concepts in this study namely: *ideology* in the *construction of news* relating to '*race'*. The discussion below deals with these three concepts individually.

Key Concepts

3. Ideology

The foregoing discussion suggests the centrality of ideology in culture. Ideology is also a key concept in the later analysis of the 'farm killings' discourse and it might be helpful to delve deeper into the concept by further unpacking its nature and effectivity.

Coined by a union of 'idea' and 'logos', ideology was intended to have a precise meaning, but has accumulated a steady proliferation of meanings due partly to the ambiguity attached to its constituent terms (Rossi-Landi 1990). Cognisant of this ambiguity and breadth, the discussion below is limited to a focus on ideology as it relates to this study i.e. 'ideology' and its relation to conditions of existence. The discussion is

divided into two parts: first, is an abridged look at ideology to lay the basis for the second part, a focus on the epistemological and sociological senses involved in the term.

3.1 Ideology conceptualised

I have already alluded to the ambiguity of 'ideology', hence, as Eagleton (1991) argues, there no single, adequate definition of the term. 'Ideology' is deployed in this study following Thompson's (1984) use of the concept in a 'critical sense' where it is linked to the process of sustaining asymmetrical power relations. In this 'widely accepted sense', ideology is associated with the ways in which meaning (or signification) serves to sustain relations of domination (Eagleton 1991). This draws our attention to the notion that an analysis of ideology is in a fundamental manner, the study of the ways in which language is used to mobilise meaning in the interests of particular individuals or groups – how 'meaning' or 'ideas' affect the conceptions or activities of the individuals and groups which make up the social world (Thompson 1992). The following section attempts to illuminate this statement by locating it within the various perspectives of 'ideology'.

3.2 Theories of Ideology

This part sets out to look at the nature and modalities of ideology. It does so from the viewpoint of the different theories of ideology namely, the Classical, Althusserian, Belief and the Rational theories. For our purposes, while the latter two theories are relevant, it is the first two that are of major significance since their articulation of ideology relates more closely to the objective in this study. One important factor is the connection between 'ideology' and the critique of domination from the standpoints of these theories. While they articulate ideology 'differently', there is no conflict or competition in their accounts.

First is the Classical/Marxist theory of ideology. For Marx & Engels, the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it (quoted in Abercombie et al 1984). According to this theory, ideology is a distorted representation of reality, a 'false consciousness' (Thompson 1984). Thus the social function of ideology, is to give agents a 'false' knowledge of the social structure, and to insert them, as it were, into their practical activities supporting this structure (Clarke et al 1978). Marxist theorising on ideology assumes a strong link between ideology and class domination and is predicated on a connection between the economic structure of society and ideology as its vital modal point (Thompson 1984; Clarke et al 1978). This conception imbues the concept of ideology with its critical edge as the 'negative force', and it maintains this connection by retaining a close relation to the institutional and structural features of society and to the analysis of power (Thompson 1984).

The Althusserian theory of ideology, on the other hand, attempts to reconcile the critical importance of superstructures, while preserving some notion of the primacy of the economy (Abercombie et al 1984). Althusser outlines the necessary relative autonomy of the superstructures, their overdetermining effect on the principal contradiction (the economic), yet nevertheless, the continuing determination by the economic 'in the last instance' remains, even though that lonely hour of the 'last instance' never comes (Mc Lennan et al 1978). Within this theory, ideology is a real relation itself i.e. the relation through which human beings live their relation to the world (Thompson 1984).

An important part of Althusser's account of ideology deals with its modus operandi, which he outlines in three theses. These following Althusser (1985) are:

- that ideology does not represent reality but rather human beings' 'lived' (imaginary) relations to their real conditions of existence.

- that ideology has material existence: the representations which make up ideology are inscribed in social practices and expressed in objective forms.

- that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects: the practico-social function specific to ideology is to constitute concrete individuals as subjects, to transform individuals into subjects.

In a nutshell, what Althusser does in his theory, Thompson (1984) observes, is to situate the problem of ideology within an institutional and structural context: the problem of ideology and domination is inseparably linked to the issues of asymmetrical power relations and how these societal arrangements are sustained.

Within the Belief theory, politics and ideology are inextricably linked. All political action, Thompson (1984) argues, is oriented towards the preservation, reform, destruction or reconstruction of the social order, and hence all political action is necessarily guided by an ideological system of beliefs. The main task for ideology within the Rational theory, relates to the bourgeois exercise of influence and legitimisation of dominance, thereby perpetuating a system within which the privileges of the hegemonic class exists (Thompson 1984).

3.3 Analysis of ideology – the critical edge

All the theories above consistently link ideology to the maintenance of domination, that is, ideology is bound up with specific 'social interests' characterised by power. They also place 'signification' at the centre of efforts to mobilise meaning in the interests of certain

individuals or groups. Ideology is seen as, Tomaselli et al (1987) argue, an interlinked

ensemble of social, political and economic structures which permeate our everyday

experiences and govern people's relations with other people in their environment. These

are the positions which imbue 'ideology' with its critical edge. They enable us to see

language, as a meaning system, not simply as a structure for communication, but, as

Thompson (1984) insists, a social-historical phenomenon which is embroiled in human

conflict. Ideological analysis is thus

> concerned with the ways in which meaning and power intersect. …This focus
> may be defined sharply as follows: to study ideology is to study the ways in
> which meaning serves to sustain relations of domination. (Thompson 1988:
> 370)

The close relation between ideology and language is borne in the realisation that 'ideas'

do not "drift through the social world like clouds in a summer sky, rather they circulate in

the world as utterances, as expressions, as words which are spoken or inscribed"

(Thompson 1984:68). Hence, as Thompson (1984) argues, to study ideology is in some

part and in some way, to study language in the social world, that is the ways in which the

multifarious uses of language intersect with power. It follows therefore that:

> To characterise a view as 'ideological' is already to criticise it, for ideology is
> not a neutral term. Hence a study of ideology is a controversial, conflict-
> laden activity which plunges the analyst into a realm of claim and counter
> claim, of allegation, accusation and reposte. It is also an activity which
> presses to the heart of issues concerning the nature of social enquiry and its
> relation to the product of critique. (Thompson 1984:1-2)

The close connection between the theory of ideology and the study of language offers a

crucial possibility i.e. linking the analysis of ideology to a focus on the nature of

language and meaning, on the one hand, and to forms of linguistics applied to texts and

social interactions on the other (Thompson 1984). This is the focus of the next section. It

is important however, to emphasise that ideology is a matter of discourse rather than

language:

> Ideology concerns the actual uses of language between particular human subjects for the production of specific effects. You could not decide whether a statement was ideological or not by inspecting it *in isolation from its discursive context…* Ideology is less a matter of inherent linguistic properties of a pronouncement than a question of who is saying what to whom for what purposes. (italics added) (Eagleton 1991:9)

This point about the crucial role of the social context within which symbolic

constructions are produced informs the deployment and application of the methods for

analysis of the 'farm killings' discourse.

The general drift of the argument here asserts that language is a medium par

excellence, through which things are 'represented' in thought and thus the medium in

which ideology is generated and transformed (Hall 1996). When this assertion is applied

on the media, it challenges the claim of the media as simply *gathering* news and

reflecting society to itself. The next section looks into 'representation' of reality from a

cultural studies perspective as another key concept in this project.

4. News construction – news as *re*presentation

Against the backdrop of the preceding discussion of the cultural studies perspective and

'ideology', it appears that one cannot hope to understand the practice of journalism

without examining the process of *news production.* Of importance here is the *creativity*

involved in the process: the *creative* work that journalists do (Chibnall 1981). Instead of

assuming that newspapers consist of faithful reports of events that happened in the world

beyond our immediate experience, this approach signals a different view of, and help us

better understand, what journalism is about (Fowler 1991). Reporters do not go out gathering news, picking up stories as if they were fallen apples, they *create* news stories by selecting fragments of information from the mass of raw data they receive and *organising* them in a conventional journalistic form (Chibnall 1981). This is the theme of this section. I shall first look at 'news' (including crime 'news') from a constructionist perspective. There will also be a brief focus on the interface between 'news' and the dominant interests in society.

Looking at journalists as 'news gatherers' and 'news-processors' who *collect* news stories and pass them on to the gate-keepers for *selection*, *abbreviation* and *organisation* is seductive but, as I shall attempt to show, very problematic (Chibnall 1981). However, the focus of this section on news 'construction' does not attempt to deny the significance of factors like the bureaucratic organisation of the media, and the structure of news values in the social production of news. When I come later to discuss the normative view of news production in the analyses chapters, I will talk more on these two factors. Here, following the cultural studies' assumptions the focus is on 'representation' and 'construction' of news articles.

In order to understand the construction of news stories, we need to examine the procedures which journalists adopt to identify and select potential stories (Chibnall 1981). MacDougall's observation illuminates this point:

> At any given moment billions of simultaneous events occur throughout the world… All of these occurrences are potentially news. They do not become so until some purveyor of news gives an account of them. The news, in other words, is the account of the event not something intrinsic in the events itself. (1968:12)

This observation accords significantly more power to journalists as 'creators' of news than the notion of 'mirroring society' does. In other words, following Hall et al (1981), the media do not simply and transparently report events which are 'naturally' newsworthy in themselves. 'News' is the end product of a complex process which begins with a systematic sorting and selection of events and topics according to a socially constructed set of categories (Hall et al 1981). While real events *do* occur and *are* reported (a farmer is killed), these events are subjected to conventional processes of selection and construction before their inclusion in newspapers as 'newsworthy items' (Fowler 1991). Hence, news is not 'found' or even 'gathered' so much as made: it is a construction of a journalistic process, a commodity even (Philo in Fowler 1991). 'News', therefore, cannot be said to be a 'neutral product' but a cultural artifact, it is a consequence of socially manufactured messages which carry many culturally dominant assumptions of our society (Glasgow University Media Group 1976). This claim is substantiated below.

News construction, Hall et al (1981) argue, involves the presentation of an item to its *assumed* audience, in terms which, as far as the presenters of the item can judge, will make it comprehensible to that audience. Bringing events within the realm of meaning means, in essence, referring unusual and unexpected events to the 'maps of meaning' which already form the basis of our cultural knowledge, into which the world is already mapped (Hall et al 1981). An important concept in this process is 'selectivity', i.e. the appropriation and transformation of the structured 'raw materials' into 'something intelligible' as the media impose their own criteria on them (Hall et al 1981). Each paper's professional sense of the newsworthy, its organisation and technical framework,

and sense of audience of regular readers is different, and this 'difference' bears upon the paper's criteria of selection (Hall et al 1981).

News production, as a process of 'making an event intelligible' (signification) is a social process constituted by a number of specific journalistic practices (Hall et al 1981). An important factor to note here is the embodiment (often implicitly) by these practices of crucial assumptions about what society is and how it works (Hall et al 1981). "One such … assumption is the *consensual* nature of society: the process of …signification both assumes and helps to construct society as a consensus." (Hall et al 1981: 55) Media practices are thus predicated upon the assumption that "… what unites us, as a society … far outweighs what divides and distinguishes us as … classes…" (Hall et al 1981: 55).

The representation of issues in the media gives them what Hall et al (1981) call, an 'external public reference'. The publicising of an issue in the media can give it a more 'objective' status as a *real* issue of public concern (Hall et al 1981). In addition the media also offer powerful interpretations of how to understand these events (Hall et al 1981). Implicit in those interpretations are orientations towards the events and the people involved in them (Hall et al 1981).

The foregoing discussion highlights several important things. One is the responsibility of journalists in news production. Events occur, they are experienced, accounts of experience are constructed for particular audiences, accounts of those accounts are fashioned, and these are either stored away or transformed into fully-fledged news stories by journalists (Chibnall 1981). It also implies that "meaning is constructed in and through language" (Hall 1997: 15).

> It is not that there is a world … 'out there', which exists free of the discourses of representation. What is 'out there' is, in part, constituted by how it is represented. (Hall 1996: 340)

Any representational discourse (including 'news') is articulated from a particular ideological position Fowler (1991). "Language is not a clear window but a refracting, structuring medium" (Fowler 1991: 10). Because institutions of news reporting are socially, economically and politically situated, all news is always reported from a particular angle (Fowler 1991). Looking at news along the lines of this discussion inspires several questions in relation to the examination of the 'farm killings' discourse:

- How was the discourse on 'farm killings' constructed?

- What was included, and what was left out of the discourse?

- How did the 'farm killings' become 'objectified' and elevated to become the pressing issue?
- How was the influence on the readers 'exercised' regarding how they understood 'farm killings'?
- How was the orientation of the readers influenced towards the people involved in the 'farm killings'?

A claim that news is a consequence of socially manufactured messages which carry many culturally dominant assumptions of society was made above. The ensuing section attempts to substantiate this point by looking at what Hall et al (1981) refer to as the 'fit' between dominant ideas and professional ideology and practice of the media.

4.1 News, professionalism and class dominant values

As a result of two critical 'structural imperatives' of news production: internal pressures (time, resources etc), and the underlying notions of impartiality and objectivity, media statements are wherever possible, grounded in 'objective' and authoritative statements

from 'accredited' sources (Hall et al 1981). The 'structural imperatives' combine to

produce a systematically structured over-accessing to the media of those in powerful and

privileged institutional positions (Hall et al 1981). These are the people who can easily

phone through, e-mail, fax an opinion, they are 'the experts', they are the 'ones who

count', who can represent others etc. The powerful thus become the '*primary definers*' of

issues and their definitions set the terms of reference within which all further debate takes

place (Hall et al 1981). It is important to note here the irony involved in this organisation.

The very rules which aim to preserve the impartiality of the media and which grow out of

desires for greater professional neutrality, also serve powerfully to orientate the media in

the 'definitions of social reality' which their 'accredited sources' provide (Hall et al

1981). News becomes elite-centred and the elite can be used to 'tell about everybody'

(Galtung & Ruge 1981). Hence, it is this structured relationship between the media and

its powerful sources which begins to open up the question of the ideological role of the

media (Hall et al 1981).

In the transformation of the 'raw material' which the powerful provide into the

finished commodity news form, not every statement is likely to be reproduced in the

media, nor is every part of each statement. (Hall et al 1981:60) This explains the very

active role that journalists play in constructing the news and thus influencing how issues

are to be understood. Hence, while the 'farm killings' discourse could be explained as

articulations by the different 'participants', this discussion emphasises two crucial issues.

One is the character of the main participants and the other is the very important and

'determining' role of the journalist. This active role by journalists notwithstanding, a

corollary of the structured relationship between the media and the 'powerful' in society is

a tendency by the media to produce, symbolically, the existing structure of power in society's institutional order (Hall et al 1981). This calls into focus the ideological work of media discourses facilitated by the manner of their construction.

Against the backdrop of the foregoing discussion it is now possible to focus on the ways in which the general elements and processes of news production operate in the production of crime news as a variant of news production. 'Farm killings' articles were about murder – a cardinal crime. The following discussion of 'crime news' might be helpful not only in the understanding of the 'farm killings' articles as crime news but could also facilitate the later analysis of these articles.

4.2 'Law and order' news - Crime news and crime as news

The title used in this section could be a flattering one. The following discussion looks at crime news in a very limited way, eschewing the complexities of relationships and procedures through which crime accounts come to be produced. For example, within that complexity are crucial influences on story writing (legal restrictions, time pressures, socio-economic context etc) which the discussion here does not engage (Chibnall 1981). The purpose here is to align the discussion of crime news to the points raised above in relation to news construction.

Crime is, almost by definition, 'news' for various reasons as outlined by (Hall et al 1981):

- Against the background of the consensus upon which news is shaped, newsworthy events are those which seem to interrupt the consensual calm.

- Crime is a transgression of the normative boundaries. It marks the boundaries of the 'consensus'.

- Crime involves 'violence', and represents a fundamental rupture in the social order. As I argue later, violence has a special status as a news value.

Paying attention to developments in crime reporting might help us understand how journalists construct their accounts of crime. One of these is a reliance on the police. The dominant role that the police play as gatekeeper, means that crime news is often police news (Sacco 1995). Hence the term 'crime reporters' can be said to be a misnomer as crime news very rarely involve a first hand account of the crime itself (Hall et al 1981; Chibnall 1981). It is for this reason that Chibnall (1981) refers to 'crime reporters' as 'police reporters'. It is however not simply the police who are crucial *primary definers* in crime news, other institutional *primary definers* do also play a significant role (Hall et al 1981). This situation, Hall et al (1981) argue, provides the basis for three typical formats for crime news namely:

- Reports based on police statements about investigations of a particular case – which involve a police reconstruction of the event and details of the action they are taking.

- The 'state of war against crime report' – statistics about crime and an interpretation by spokespersons of what they mean.

- The staple diet of crime reporting – court cases and brief summary reports.

While crime evokes threats to the 'consensus', it also reaffirms the consensual morality of the society (Hall et al 1981). For example, where there seems to be very wide consensus (as against crime), matters become unambiguous and counter definitions are almost absent (Hall et al 1981). The morally cohesive function of crime news points to the way in which news accounts, as a major form of constructing and transmitting social knowledge, are fundamentally ideological (Knight & Dean 1982). In crime news the dominant definitions 'command the field' of signification relatively unchallenged and

what debate there is, tends to take place almost exclusively within the terms of reference

of the controllers (Hall et al 1981). This has significant implications:

> [It] … tends to repress any play between dominant and alternative
> definitions; by 'rendering all potential definitions invisible', it pushes the
> treatment of the crime in question sharply on to the terrain of the pragmatic –
> given that there is a problem about crime what can we do about it? In the
> absence of an alternative definition, powerfully and articulately proposed, the
> scope for any reinterpretation of crime by the public as an issue of public
> concern is extremely limited. (Hall et al 1981: 69)

Crime news illustrates most effectively, the system of beliefs, values and understandings

which underlies newspapers representations of reality (Chibnall 1977). There is no other

domain of news interest in which latent press ideology becomes more explicit than in

crime news (Chibnall 1977).

> Nowhere else is it made so clear what it is that newspapers value as healthy
> and praiseworthy or deplore as evil and degenerate in society. Nowhere else
> are the limits of newspaper values such as neutrality, objectivity and balance
> revealed with such clarity. Crime … represents simultaneously, a challenge
> to newspapers' liberal and consensual view of society and a source of
> ideological reinforcement. (Chibnall 1977: X)

Consequently, Hall et al (1981) argue, one of the areas where the media are most likely to

be successful in mobilising public opinion within the dominant framework of ideas is on

issues about crime and its threat to society. Crime news may serve as a focus for the

articulation of shared morality and communal sentiments:

> A chance [for newspapers] not simply to speak *to* the community, but also *for*
> the community, against all that the criminal outsider represents, to delineate
> the shape of the threat, to advocate a response, to eulogise on conformity to
> established norms and values, and to warn of the consequences of deviance.
> (Chibnall 1977: XI)

The elements and processes of crime news production highlighted above provide a useful

framework within which the 'farm killings' discourse as crime news can be analysed.

Another central concept in this study is 'race'. This is apparent in Stofile's claim

in chapter one that the press 'turned a blind eye to the suffering of blacks'. It is therefore

important to look into this concept in terms of its deployment in this study.

5. 'Race'

From the earlier claims by both Stofile and Berger (1997), to the discussion of the

sociology of the country's press in chapter two, racism in reportage arises as the

'disturbing question' at the centre of this study. The thrust of that chapter locates the

history of the country's press within efforts by successive governments to use group

differences to create a hierarchy of privilege for whites (Banton 1987). Hence the

centrality of 'race' and racism in this study. This section attempts to understand these

concepts within the theoretical framework of this study. It does not engage with theories

of racial divergence, the sociology, nor the complexities of 'race'. Instead, following

Harvey (1990), some general features characterising media representation of 'race' will

be outlined. The discussion therefore looks at 'race' and its relation to racism and

representation.

5.1 Problematising 'race'

While 'race' is an important concept in this study, it is also a meaningless one. This study

denies any inherent notion of biological characteristics and traits attributable to racial

origin (Harvey 1990). However, as the second chapter demonstrates, attribution is a

common practice and the debunking of 'race' here does not seek to displace the very

powerful impression that social relations and distribution of life chances are influenced

mightily by such classifications (Gandy 1998). The point is that such attribution is

politically charged and dynamic, it is social and not natural nor inevitable (Harvey 1990).

Cohen makes the point poignantly:

> 'Race' is not an empirical social category but is social in as much as it is an ideological construct signifying a set of imaginary properties of inheritance, which fix and legitimate real positions of social domination and subordination, in terms of genealogies of generic difference. (quoted in Harvey 1990: 157)

'Race' and racism are closely related terms as a result the view of racial attribution as fundamental to racism (Harvey 1990). The next discussion looks at this relation.

5.2 Racism – towards a definition

Here, following Hall (1996), and Teo (2000), I will look at racism from two 'angles', namely: the traditional and the modern ways of viewing racism. Traditionally, racism entails viewing 'other' people as less civilised, as standing lower on the order of culture because they are sometimes lower in the order of nature defined by 'race', colour and by genetic inheritance (Hall 1996; Dutton & Mundy 1995). New modern forms of racism emphasising traditional values and culture have evolved, replacing an earlier emphasis on biologically determined incapacity that assigned blacks and other subordinate groups to their despised and pitiable position (Gandy 1998). While the assignment of these groups to 'their' positions in the status and value hierarchy is similar to traditional racism, justifications appear to have changed as a result of media coverage and elite framing of issues as discussed above (Gandy 1998). This 'new racism', with which this study is mainly concerned, is much more subtle, covert and hence insidious. It is a form of racism which van Dijk argues, is compatible with a belief in basic values of democratic egalitarianism (Teo 2000). Following Teo (2000), the people who practice this form of

racism would speak in such a way that distances themselves from the subordinate groups, engage in discursive strategies that blame the victims for social, economic and cultural disadvantage. For our purposes here "racism is not an awareness of 'difference', but the stigmatisation of 'difference' in order to justify advantage or the abuse of power, whether that advantage or abuse be economic, political, cultural or psychological" (Shohat & Stam in Gandy 1998:68). Looking at racism from the constructionist view could enable a constructive analysis of racism in newspaper discourses involving 'race' issues, as 'race' in a society can itself be viewed as a media-mediated 'reality'.

5.3 Racial *representation*

The following discussion looks at racial representation and attempts to show how communication can serve to create and sustain allegiances, bonds, options and ligatures that define social location (Gandy 1998). Two key 'representational strategies': stereotyping and 'naturalisation', are central to a discussion of 'racial' representation. Hall (1997) defines the two concepts as follows:

- Stereotyping refers to a simplification, reducing to a few essentials.

- Naturalisation is a strategy designed to 'fix' difference and thus secure it forever.

Both these practices have important consequences. On the one hand, Bar-Tal argues, stereotypes contribute to a deligitimisation of a group and contribute to a justification of negative attitudes towards the group (Wonsek 1992). On the other hand, when 'race' is naturalised, racism is viewed as an external problem and not as an integral part of capitalism (Harvey 1990).

Media stereotypes of blacks, following Hall 1996 and Harvey 1990, are characteristic the 'dominant pathological view' of blacks (the notion that 'blacks are a problem'), and include negative imagery of blacks (primitivism, savagery, guile), absences of accounts of black people as central part of discourse, and simplified and truncated way of representing black experience. These stereotypes are consistent with van Dijk's (1987) earlier findings in his review of 'race' representation in the press.

Stereotyping members of a group as violent etc, means that the descriptions that emphasise such features are likely to evoke an image of that group, and in the absence of other information that group is likely to be identified and evaluated as such (Gandy 1998). The victim-blaming tendencies discussed above are another important dimension of stereotyping (Gandy 1998).

From this discussion, it is through communication that the structural influence of racism is maintained:

> To the degree that these impressions are broadly shared, they exist as a framework or structure of meaning within the culture that we also rely upon to guide us through interactions that may be outside our normal routines. (Gandy 1998: 4)

Racism as a structure of knowledge and representation is directed to secure us 'over here', and them 'over there', to fix each in its appointed species' place (Hall 1996). It offers its own perverse pleasures in providing the racist with an easy and unearned feeling of superiority and a superficial sense of solidarity based upon antipathy to a chosen group (Ferguson 1998). In this sense, racism can be viewed as an ideological code that seizes, opportunistically, on various ideological signifiers that work most

effectively at any point in time to naturalise difference and legitimate domination (Harvey 1990).

All the concepts discussed above provide a useful framework for the ideological analysis of the 'farm killings' discourse. It is a complex exercise, which requires a suitably equipped method. Priest (1996) refers to the qualitative methods used in such cases as discourse or rhetorical analysis which draw from the same intellectual traditions underlying the analysis of literary fiction or public speech. These rhetorical/discourse analytical procedures of assessing media content can both be empirical and rigorous, even though their interpretative focus and emphasis cannot directly answer questions about cause and effect (Dryzek 1992; Priest 1996). Fowler's critical linguistics approach is sensitive to the theoretical concerns cited above. It could be used effectively to provide 'answers' to the questions raised in this study and has thus been selected as the analytic approach. In discussing this approach below, I will also attempt to highlight its relevance to the aims of this study.

Techniques and Procedure

6. Critical linguistics

To repeat an earlier point, the language of everyday life is the very locus of ideology and the very site of meaning which sustains relations of domination (Thompson 1984). Like all other brands of discourse analysis, critical linguistics is concerned with the significance and structuring effects of language, and is associated with reflexive and interpretive styles of analysis (Burman & Parker 1993). Deacon et al (1999) refer to 'discourse' as one important term in critical linguistics. They identify and explain two

levels at which critical linguistics concerns itself with the use of language. One of these is the use of language in social life, focussing on language in its concrete social cultural and historical context, instead of a sociologically and historically sterile approach. The second is its concern with the relationship between language use and social structure, i.e. viewing language as constitutive of social reality, and emphasising the relations of power and knowledge which certain formations of discourse allow and make possible.

Viewing language as indelibly social in character implies that competence in language use involves more than just linguistic competence. "Such competence requires not only syntactical mastery of sentence construction and combination, but also mastery of the circumstances and settings in which particular forms of utterance and communication are appropriate" (Deacon et al 1999: 148). In other words, for critical linguistics there is no invariant relationship between form and meaning: a linguistic form does not have a single, constant meaning, but rather a range of potential significances-in-context (Fowler 1991). Hence, following van Dijk (1991) and Fowler (1991), an analysis of any linguistic structure is not limited to 'textual' analysis, but also accounts for relations between structures of text talk, on the one hand, and of their cognitive, social, cultural or historical contexts on the other hand.

A key critical linguistics position maintains that language, and thus media texts, is not neutral, but a highly constructive mediator and an effective form for encoding representations of experience and values (Ferguson 1998; Fowler 1991; Fowler 1986; Fairclough 1995). Fowler expresses it this way:

> News is a representation of the world in language: because language is a semiotic code, it imposes a structure of values, social and economic in origin, on whatever is represented; and so inevitably news, like every discourse, constructively patterns that of which it speaks (1991: 4).

News therefore, according to Fairclough (1995), is a socially and historically situated mode of action, in a dialectical relationship with other facets of the social, that is, news is socially shaped but is also socially shaping. Thus conceived, media texts tend more often than not to mobilise or reinforce relations of control (Deacon et al 1999). With this insight, critical linguistics can be deployed to illuminate different facets of the structures of media texts, and to trace the means by which language use in the media contributes to the ongoing production of social conceptions, values, identities and relations (Deacon et al 1999).

Fowler (1991) states that news is produced by an industry, shaped by the bureaucratic and economic structure of that industry, by the relations between the media and other industries, and by the relations with government and with other political organisations. Therefore, he argues, in writing news reports, journalists adopt a style appropriate to the particular paper and more generally still, reflecting the social and economic processes within which the paper participates. As I mentioned in chapter two, the economic motive of the media industry brings with it important consequences for media practice. These, as pointed out by Fowler (1991), relate to 'news identification', 'news-gathering', and news reporting strategies. I will now focus briefly on the first two points and their linguistic consequences. The third will be dealt with further below.

'Newsgathering' strategies are devised to ensure economy of time and effort and only certain kinds of sources (those that are established by official authority, by social status and by commercial success) are worth tapping consistently (Fowler 1991). News values also ensure that only certain aspects of the broader reality are represented in news. This "imbalance of access results in partiality, not only in what assertions and attitudes

are reported – a matter of content – but also in how they are reported - a matter of style, and therefore of ideological perspective" (Fowler 1991: 22-3). Following Fowler (1991), several other points are worth noting about some of the news values guiding journalists in determining newsworthiness:

- Personalisation : the obsession with persons (at the expense of principles and issues), and the media use of them as symbols avoids serious discussion and explanation of underlying social and economic factors.

- Meaningfulness – with its sub-sections 'cultural proximity' and 'relevance' - is founded on an ideology of ethnocentrism, or in Fowler's term, 'homocentrism': a preoccupation with individuals perceived to be like oneself.

Fowler's (1991) conclusion that news values are to be regarded as intersubjective mental categories emanate from this observation, and places stereotyping at the centre of the processes of news formation and the formulation of news values.

Critical linguistics provides tools which could be useful in critical analysis of news reporting (Deacon et al 1999). These tools can be applied in analysing the classificatory functions of language, that is, the means by which language creates order out of the welter of phenomena in the world and defines how social reality is to be understood (Deacon et al 1999). A good starting point for looking at the classificatory function of language is provided by Halliday's observation regarding the functions of language. For him language serves three major functions, namely, to communicate about events and processes in the world (*ideational function*), to express a speakers' attitude to these propositions and a perceived relation with an interlocutor (*interpersonal function*), and to present these in coherent and appropriate texts (*textual function*) (Deacon et al 1999; Fairclough 1993). In the performance of these functions there are several key linguistic features and concepts which provide crucial avenues for analysis. Below is an

annotated checklist of significant linguistic features which can be revealing in a textual analysis.

One such feature is *transformation/transitivity*. It involves two transformative processes, namely, nominalisation and passivisation. Nominalisation refers to a nominal expression of concepts for which an expression involving a verb or an adjective would have been available to the writer. Passivisation on the other hand refers to the deletion of participants, lexicalisation and placing non-agents in the subject position in a sentence (Fowler & Kress 1979). There are alternative choices of structure available for the news writer as the news is subjected to the process which Hall et al (1981), referred to above as 'transformation' in its encoding for publication. Fowler (1991) and Fairclough (1995) make important observations regarding this transformation process: that each particular linguistic expression in a text has its reason; that there are always different ways of saying the same thing and they are not random, accidental alternatives; and that differences in expression carry ideological distinctions. Syntactic transformation of the clause concerns itself with the position and sequence of elements within a linguistic structure (Fairclough 1995). Van Dijk (1991) refers to the textual result of choices between alternative ways of saying the same thing by using a different syntactic structure as 'style'. Such stylistic choices, he asserts, have clear social/ideological implications.

Lexical structure is another significant area for analysis. Fowler (1991) argues that a critical analyst has to note, in the discourses s/he is studying just what terms habitually occur, and what segments of the society's world enjoys constant discursive attention. Lexical choice can suggest certain ideological beliefs and values underpinning particular stories (Deacon et al 1999). The 'ordering of the world', Fowler & Kress

(1979) argue, is made through 'relexicalisation' (relabelling or reorientations of meaning) and 'overlexicalisation' (a number of synonyms for communicating which are indicative of areas of intense preoccupation in the experience and values of the group generating it).

Van Dijk (1991) provides an opposite view to this. He argues that one of the most powerful semantic notions in critical news analysis is that of *'implication'*, since much of the information of a text is not explicitly expressed, but inferred on the basis of background. Our 'scripts', that is our shared social knowledge of events and issues, provide the 'missing links' (van Dijk 1991). Ideological implications follow, however, not only because too little is said, but also because too many irrelevant things are said about news actors – what van Dijk (1991) calls 'strategic use of irrelevance'.

Modality is another significant concern for ideological analysis. This relates to the manner in which relations of domination in the wider society underlie the media construction of relations and identities (Fairclough 1995). It is a 'comment' or 'attitude' ascribable to the source of the text evidenced (implicitly/explicitly) by the linguistic stance taken by the writer (Fowler 1991). 'Modality' covers linguistic constructions which may be called pragmatic and interpersonal (Fowler & Kress 1979). These constructions, Fowler & Kress (1979) continue, express the writer's attitudes towards themselves, towards their interlocutors and their subject matter, their social and economic relations with the people they address, and the actions which are performed via language.

Speech acts is another important feature for ideological analysis. Fowler and Kress (1979) argue that every utterance besides communicating content constitutes an action performed by the speaker in relation to his/her addressee. In speech acts, they continue, the major meanings are concerned with establishing linguistic role relations

between speaker and hearer, and the subsequent control of the addressee's behaviour.

Deacon et al (1999) identify several other useful areas for ideological coding as: below.

- *Intertextual relations* between stories: while any one news report may have its own constitutive features, it is not independent from other texts/discourses surrounding it.

- *Positioning of a story in the paper*: the location of stories in the newspaper i.e. on the front page or subsequent pages, top, bottom, left or right hand side of the paper.

- *Composition of a story*: typographical features including style and layout

- *Organisation of the story*: overall arrangement and narrative contouring of the material out of which the news text is constructed (prioritisation/ relegation of issues).

- *Source quality and quantity*: the way in which sources are treated and in which attributed sources and discourses vary in terms of the degree of certitude, qualification and emphasis of phrasing and tone.

- *Framing procedures*: Framing procedures also means the examination of the way certain sources are used to undermine or discredit what is advanced by others whose identified position is at variance with those who are given priority.

As was indicated earlier, in addition to these features there are two interrelated

concepts which are also important as we unravel the rhetoric of a particular news

discourse. These are identified and discussed by Deacon et al (1999) as:

- *Thematic structure*: a preoccupying conception which runs throughout a media text usually around an initiating topic. It provides a sense of overall organisation, hierarchy and relations between different units of the text (sentences and paragraphs).

- *Discourse schemata*: involves the grouping of information and circumstantial detail into sequentially and hierarchically ordered categories and units of meaning. In news, this entails a patterned movement from headlines and lead paragraphs to statements by witnesses and commentators which are ranked in an implicit order of priority, to the further elaboration and possible extrapolation often coming from accredited sources. Van Dijk (1991) calls this, the 'instalment character of topic realisation'.

The foregoing discussion supports Fowler's (1991) definition of critical linguistics as

a method which seeks, by studying the minute details of linguistic structures in the light

of the social and historical situation of the text, to display to consciousness, the patterns

of belief and value which are encoded in the language – and which are below the threshold of notice for anyone who accepts the discourse as natural. It also positions critical linguistics as a suitable method for analysing the discourse on 'farm killings'.

Priest (1996) argues that a good qualitative content study represents something more than an opinionated essay illustrated with examples. "It requires an open minded researcher, a specific research question and a systematic way of looking at whatever content is chosen…" (Priest 1996: 114). It is therefore important that qualitative research should be explicit about strategies so that the rigour is evident (Ambert et al 1995). In the following section I attempt to demonstrate a systematic approach to content: how I came to qualify articles as 'farm killings' stories and chose some for analysis from the rest of the *Herald*'s 'farm killings' articles.

6.2 Procedure and methods

In this study, several techniques of both a qualitative (analysis of texts) and quantitative nature (preliminary content analyses) were used in the gathering and analysis of data. While this study focuses on media texts, aspects of quantitative research have been used, following Lewis' insight that "…quantitative research might, if applied with…imagination be useful to cultural studies" (1992: 91). For example, news reports on 'farm killings' span several years. It is not unusual in research that the chance of investigating an entire population is remote due to time and resource constraints (Wimmer & Dominick 1987). The research period was therefore, delimited in keeping with the qualitative study's exclusive concern with depth rather than breadth. A

qualitative researcher seeks to acquire in-depth information about a smaller group of subjects (Ambert et al 1995).

The first step was to look at the entire population of available data. According to the Eastern Cape Crime Information Analysis Centre (CIAC) of the South African Police Services which keeps annual records of 'farm violence' from 1994, most farm "victimisations" (murder, rape, robbery, and assault) occurred in 1998 - totaling 143 "victims." This is significantly higher than the annual average total for 1994 to 1997, which stands at just above 65 "victims." Also in 1998, a full cross-section of people in terms of the CIAC classification of ethnicity, gender and age, were targeted. Since journalists rely most on the police for crime news (see Chibnall 1981), and since most violent incidents recorded by the police occurred in 1998, it is from this year's reports that a 'sample' of news articles was selected following a preliminary content analysis.

A content analysis of the *Herald*'s 1998 copies was done as an initial selection method to identify a period for analysis. Content analysis is defined by Robinson & Reed (1998), as the reviewing of data to elicit recurrent themes. This method was, however, employed in a preliminary way, eschewing the complexity involved in its conduct. Following the preliminary content analyses of the 1998 reports on 'farm killings', articles carried by the paper in August were selected based on the following criteria:

- August was the month in which the newspaper carried most reports on 'farm killings' in spite of competing social events, such as major rugby matches.

- Within this month the paper ran four editorials outlining the paper's view on the killings which the news articles do not outline as clearly.

- The newspaper carried particularly lengthy stories with vivid on-the-scene pictures. A significant number of these were given the best play possible on the front pages.

A total of 51 articles dealing with 'farm killings', either in the headline or in the story content were published in that period. These cannot all be adequately dealt with within the limited scope of this study. From the preliminary content analysis, six broad categories of 'farm killings' stories were identified. These are:

- *Original story*: the main report about the murder, totaling 5.

- *Opinion piece*: either a letter to the editor or an editorial, totaling 4.

- *Reaction to/Comments on*, the 'farm killings' by various agencies, totaling 19.

- *Follow-up stories* on already reported 'farm killings' incidents, totaling 11.

- *Farm attacks* stories where no murder was committed, totaling 5.

- *Court reports*, of the 'farm killings', totaling 7

Based on the reasons stipulated below, only the first four categories i.e. original story, opinion, reaction/comments and follow-up stories were selected for analysis.

- Since the murder is sudden, the construction of the original report is likely to be more spontaneous. In such cases, Goshorn & Gandy (1995), argue that journalists are more likely to rely upon readily available ideologically structured interpretations.

- Comments and reaction stories could indicate trends in, and treatment of 'definitions' rendered and 'participation' in the media discourse on 'farm killings'.

- An editorial opinion could provide insight into the newspaper's own stance in relation to the subject.

The construction of a total of 42 articles, including four editorials, will thus be analysed.

The following ideological examination of these articles relies on the concepts explicated above, is located within the theoretical assumptions outlined and is informed by the by the critical linguistics method discussed above.

Chapter 4

Ideological Analysis - editorials

1. Examination of the *Herald*'s articles

This section deals with the crux of this study – the ideological analysis of the *Herald*'s 'farm killings' stories. A brief deviation from the theoretical and methodological assumptions which hitherto have been central in the development of this study, might help illuminate the point of this analysis.

A fleeting overview of media content reveals two broad types of content. Borrowing Hulteng's (1973) terms, these are 'straight news'('factual articles'), and editorials and other interpretive articles. Arguments for this 'segregated content' view are predicated on the concept of 'objective reporting' and cite an 'obligation of the paper to go beyond news gathering' in suggesting a need for explanatory editorials (MacDougall 1973). The following analysis is patterned along these two 'compartments'. First to be analysed will be the editorials and their analysis is conducted in terms of several identified themes: headlines, government discourse, view of crime, argumentation, and issue endorsement. This is however preceded by a brief discussion of the nature, functions, production and critique of editorials to contextualise the subsequent analysis.

1.1   Understanding Editorials

An editorial constitutes an important component of a newspaper's content. If newspapers are powerful to sway opinion, a large part of their effectiveness comes from the comments on their editorial pages (Kriegbaum 1956). Hence, attention to editorials must surely be part of any broader consideration of the press and politics (Davies 1987). The

importance of an editorial, within the functionalist perspective, is borne in the 'need' for exposure to the opinions of others – and not just the opinions of those with an axe to grind. (Hulteng 1973). The apparent dispassionate analysis that editorials are capable of assigns a particular role to them. Stonecipher's definition of an editorial makes the point:

> An editorial may be defined as a presentation of fact and opinion in concise, logical, pleasing order for the sake …of influencing opinion, or interpreting significant news in such a way that its importance to the average reader will be clear. (1979: 41)

While prominent display of a news story or an illuminating explanation may help a community make up its mind, editorials are a focal point of any publication's most deliberate effort to create or mould public opinion (Kriegbaum 1956).

Editorials are not unorganised essays. They have a structure – the headline, introduction, body and conclusion (Kriegbaum 1956). Second, editorial writing puts a premium on brevity (Davies 1987). Third, clarity and precision in the use of language are necessary, and in terms of the various forms of composition, editorials may employ either exposition, narration, description or argumentation (Stonecipher 1979). This enables them to appeal to the intellect - marshalling evidence and documentation, or to emotions – focusing on arousal (Stonecipher 1979).

While a distinction between editorials and 'straight news' has been made above, this should not be taken to depict a dichotomy. As I elaborate below, the difference is better presented as a continuum. Looking at the uses and the production of editorials strengthens the point.

1.1.1   What do editorials do?

Almost every author on editorial writing has her/his own view of what functions

editorials perform. We have seen under the discussion of 'factual' and 'subjective

writing', that editorials give newspapers a chance to present their policies and beliefs

without colouring the regular news stories with biased statements (Harris & Johnson

1965). The following is not an exhaustive list of what editorials do, but it does suggest

possibilities (see Davies 1987; Harris & Johnson 1965; Rystrom 1983):

- Issue endorsement – some editorials aim to convince readers on the rightfulness of a position being advocated by logical force or even by emotion of expression.
- Exhort – some editorials are a call to action, e.g. 'Bring back the death penalty'.
- Praise – citizens, countries, groups etc. can be congratulated on a 'job-well-done'.
- Recognise – editorials can support civic projects or figures.
- Comment – some focus on social issues, e.g. 'South Africa today'
- Chide – editorials can help fight intolerance.
- Analyse –interpreting complex news events or ambiguous public issues.
- Inform – editorials can make useful exposés.

These points position editorials as journalistic essays which either attempt (1) to inform

or explain; (2) to persuade or convince; or (3) to stimulate insight (Stonecipher 1979).

With such profound functions the process of producing editorials becomes important.

How long does it take to research? What goes into it? These are some of the questions

addressed in the following section.

1.1.2 Editorials: the production process.

Earlier I referred to the difference between editorials and news articles as a continuum.

This is partly because of several similarities in their functions and production. Chosen

from important events rather than minor news stories, editorials should be timely: readers

are more interested in news than in history (Harris & Johnson 1965). The editorial page

like the rest of the newspaper has a daily deadline (Davies 1987). Davies (1987) notes

two important determinants of editorial content: a formal meeting of management –

where editorials are discussed, and less formal conversations - where issues are discussed

among colleagues. A combination of the functions and the way editorials are produced

exposes them to serious criticism.

1.1.3 Editorials: a critique

A caveat would be in order before going into the ensuing critique of editorials. The

criticism is based on specific case study-type experiences and caution is necessary if one

wants to make any generalisations. Some statements may be construed to be 'too strong'

without the essential scientific support in the form of cited research. The following points

are quoted from Kriegbaum (1956); Stonecipher (1979) and Davies (1987):

- It may not be possible for editorial writers to fill two or three columns daily with profound remarks on a wide range of subjects. Hence editorials must be written even if opinions are still only half-formed or worse, half-baked.
- Editorials reflect big business attitudes of publishers and their interests.
- Editorial favours are sold to the highest bidder.
- Insufficient editorial attention is paid to the 'significant silences' in the news.
- Too many commentators live in 'Ivory Towers'.
- Editorial writing is bookish, prosy and pontifical.
- Editorials are ineffective because they are unsigned and institutional.
- An editorial topic requires time for research, for thinking and for writing.

In the foregoing discussion, a deliberate subjective view of editorials is

foregrounded which can be contrasted with 'factual news' articles. The analysis below

engages with the significant points made. In spite of the critique, a case has been made

for a dispassionate, balanced and even didactic editorial reflection on issues.

This project, however, adopts a different view. It argues, following Fowler

(1991), that editorials have an important symbolic function, seeming to partition off the

'opinion' component of the paper, seemingly supporting the claim that other sections, by contrast, are pure 'fact' or 'reports'. As he argues, representation in a semiotic medium such as language is inevitably a structuring process. Values and implicit propositions are continuously articulated as discourse on a subject proceeds, so that a discourse is always a representation from a certain point of view (Fowler 1991). This theory of representation is as valid for Hulteng's 'straight news' as it is for editorials. The main distinction between the two, Fowler (1991) observes, is not that editorials offer values and beliefs, but that they employ textual strategies which foreground the speech act of offering values and beliefs. The following analysis bears out Fowler's point. It is ordered in accordance with the themes stated earlier in this chapter .

1.2 Ideological Analysis: Editorials

Significant themes for the analysis of the editorials include:

- Headlines.
- The discourse on government, participants in the discourse and the creation of the 'we' and 'them' references.
- The editorials' view of the crime.
- The argumentation in the editorials.
- Issue-endorsement by the editorials.

These themes are very closely related and often complement each other. Their separation in the analysis is simply aimed at facilitating easier reference to the editorials.

1.2.1 Headlines of the editorials

A total of four editorials were carried by the *Herald* in August 1998. These were headlined **National Crisis** (*Herald* 12/8/1998), **Make a Plan** (*Herald* 18/8/1998), **Summit of Sense** (*Herald* 20/8/1998), and **A Final Option** (*Herald* 31/8/1998). While

the ideological signification in the headlines does not necessarily constitute the same theme, analysing them together here could provide a useful point of departure for the subsequent thematic analysis. All further reference to the editorials will be made by simply citing their respective headlines.

The first of the editorials, **National Crisis**, follows a series of news articles on 'farm killings'. It is significant to note that the term *crisis* is not 'original' to the editorial, but is an epithet of the South African Agricultural Union (SAAU) (see *Herald* 1/8/1998). Strikingly, in its first usage, while it is attributed to the Union, it is not enclosed in quotation marks. The contrast between this style and the 'professional distance' and perhaps scepticism used to mark government definitions is quite notable. For instance:

> farm killings 'not political' (*Herald* 8/8/1998) or
> Hanekom 'quoted out of context' (*Herald* 15/8/1998).

The newspaper shares the definition of what was happening as a 'crisis' in spite of competing definitions. Trying to water down the 'crisis' concept, for instance, the government said: "it was not only farmers that were being killed … many people die in the townships daily, but their deaths were not reported" (*Herald* 03/08/1998). The discourse is however established and in the process some definitions are elevated into prominence and rendered credible while others are marginalized.

The series of reports on 'farm killings' preceding the editorial tend to foreground the frequency of the 'killings' through an overplay of statistics, paving the way for the launch of the 'crisis' concept in the discourse:

> "Five murdered in two days….," and terms like
> "killings spree continues unabated,"
> "another murder" etc.

The headline of the editorial immediately draws attention to a 'crisis' of national proportions. It is significant that whilst a picture of a 'National Crisis' is painted, *all* the subjects of the *Herald*'s 'farm killings' discourse are white. This is in spite of the Crime Information Analysis Centre's (CIAC) report showing that more than 30% of the people 'targeted' on farms are either 'black', 'coloured' or Asian.

The second editorial, **Make a Plan,** essentially constitutes 'a call to action', an exhortation. The ideological significance of the 'call' comes from the nature of the discourse surrounding it. This refers to the dominant definitions, participants and lexical structure/choices in the discourse. The headline in this regard is only a tip of Van Dijk's (1991:112), "semantic iceberg." Explaining "semantic iceberg", Van Dijk states:

> Our 'scripts' (our shared social knowledge of issues), provide us with the numerous 'missing links' between the concepts and propositions of the text, which is, so to speak, a semantic iceberg of which only the tip is actually expressed, whereas the other information is presupposed to be known by the readers. This dependence on world knowledge and beliefs also makes coherence subjective and ideological. (112: 1991)

Linguistically, **Make a Plan** does not say much. It contains no subject. However, culturally, the headline is a derivation from the Afrikaans language parodying the phrase "'*n Boer maak 'n plan*." Directly translated this means 'a farmer makes a plan'. In the circumstances of its usage, it is loaded with ideological signification. "'*n Boer maak 'n plan*" is used 'when the conventional ways cannot work, when it cannot be done according to the handbook'. The term '*Boer*' within the political situation in the country has assumed other connotations. It refers to Afrikaner farmers, not just any farmer and particularly not to black farmers. The editorial harnesses this view. The 'call' is being made to the 'Afrikaners' to whom the editorial addresses itself. A quick look at the

lexical structure of the wider discourse supports this interpretation as I argue below. A suggestion is made that conventional means for the protection of 'citizens' do not work and therefore, an exhortation is made to white farmers to devise alternative strategies.

Summit of Sense is ostensibly an acknowledgement of a '*sense*-ible' initiative by the government:

> "So his [President Mandela's] call for a summit to assess the situation should be met with positive co-operation from all interest groups…"

However, immediately after this 'acknowledgement', the initiative and credit is wrested away from the government:

> "… however frustrated some may feel about the ineffective response to their earlier calls for just such a meeting."

Contrary to what the headline seems to suggest, **Summit of Sense** does not undermine the generally aggressive tone of all the editorials towards the government. The common epithet, 'ineffective', connects the editorial to the others on government related discourse. Following the call for co-operation, reference to the government ceases and the rest of the editorial becomes a sanguine discussion of the "Democratic Party's … plan to end the killings." It is difficult to see how these subsequent propositions are connected to the President's call for a summit. This is what van Dijk refers to as local coherence:

> One of the important notions studied in text semantics is that of the local coherence of the text: how are the subsequent propositions of the text bound together. Whether they refer to texts that are related. (1991)

It appears that the editorial attempts to suggest an agenda for the summit and this, it implies, should be the DP's 'plan', which appears to be what the term 'sense' in the headline actually refers to.

The last editorial: **A Final Option** effectively closes the debate on the options available to address the 'farm killings'. It is also reminiscent of Hitler's 'final solution to the Jewish problem'. Hitler saw the killing of the Jews as the 'only solution': the editorial sees the death sentence as the 'only solution' to the 'farm killings' problem. Several generic statements on other forms of punishment and on the perpetrators of crime are made in an effort to lend support to the 'final option' proposal:

"Offering *merciful solutions* will do little to appease the rising tide of dissent."
"Offering *kindness* to *cowardly killers* …" (emphasis added).

These set the stage for the suggestion of the 'only' deterrent – the death penalty, the final option. While there is a clear attempt to motivate for this 'final option', there is no mention of any other options besides the generic 'merciful solutions' and 'kindness'.

In summary, the editorial headlines discussed above signal a close alignment of the *Herald*'s editorial opinion with the dominant positions in the 'farm killings' discourse and its opposition to other competing positions. This observation is pursued further below. They provide a concise yet powerful and ideologically loaded re-articulation of the dominant positions in the discourse. In various subtle ways, they address themselves to the white section of the country's population. This strategy is enhanced by careful lexical choices which shape their wording.

The discussion of the view of the government and the creation of the 'we' and 'them' in the editorials below, illustrates further the alignment of the editorials to certain positions in the discourse as well as to the white citizens of the country.

1.2.2   View of the government, 'participation' in the discourse and the creation of the 'we' and 'them' in the editorials

To repeat an earlier point, the term *crisis* in **National Crisis** is not 'original' to the editorial, it 'belongs' to the SAAU. As indicated above, in its first usage it is not enclosed in quotation marks. Here an argument on the different treatment meted out by the *Herald* to the definitions by the various 'participants' in the 'farm killings' discourse is developed.

The editorials actively and effectively negate government 'definitions' of the situation without substantiation:

> "Clearly, there is a huge exasperation with Agriculture Minister Derek Hanekom after his comments about bad relations on farms and income disparities [which he reportedly linked to the killings]." (**National Crisis**)

The editorial does not cite any evidence in support of the size of the alleged exasperation, who it is felt by, or what its cause is. Similarly, the editorial assumes that it is 'clear' that there is exasperation without any reference to the subject or the basis for the assumption. All these statements are left hanging and unexplained. However, the 'authority' with which they are written imbues them with significant power and influence.

I have already remarked on the choice of 'crisis' as a definer of the situation. Here I raise another point related to the choice of **National Crisis** for the headline. It is significant that whilst a picture of a national crisis is painted, *all* the subjects of the *Herald*'s 'farm killings' discourse are white. This does not concur with the CIAC report showing that more than 30% of the people 'targeted' on farms are either 'black', 'coloured' or Asian. The concept –nation – as used in the editorials, assumes very specific and exclusive connotations, reminiscent of its use during the apartheid era, as discussed in chapter two. In the only reference made to 'people' other than the usual

'farmers' and 'farming community' namely, 'labour', the discourse within which the reference is handled is revealing:

> "Rightly, Mandela wants *labour* to be part of the summit. *They, of all people,* can be most vigilant in the watch for suspicious strangers. And *their* prosperity hangs on security, *too* (emphasis added) (**Summit of Sense**)

Immediately 'labour' is effectively designated as 'outsiders' in the discourse. '*They*' come across in the discourse as a different *'people'*, not part of the 'we' or 'farming community'. The impression created is that their inclusion in the summit is 'wanted' by *'Mandela'* (himself a black man). The question that arises is, why this specific attribution of the idea to 'Mandela' if the editorial agrees with it as implied by 'Rightly…'

It is tempting to contrast the pronouns used in the above quotation with those used in the second editorial: **Make a Plan**:

> *We*'re a nation of pushovers waiting for Government and a benign justice system to do something. Meanwhile *the criminals* are walking all over *us*. It is every citizen's responsibility to resist crime. *Let's* do it. (Emphasis added)

The editorial aligns itself with a group of people who are the objects of criminal activity. Within the editorial, this group is referred to as 'farmers' (mentioned three times). In a country where farmers are historically white and farm labourers black, the editorial identifies itself with the white 'race' group and not with the black 'race' group. The 'we' in both editorials excludes the 'Government' and the 'labourers'. This categorisation carries through to the discourse in which the term 'farming community' is used. Our analysis of the headline **Make a Plan** itself lends strong support to this claim. The editorial sees 'Mandela's idea' as 'right' to the extent that 'labour' can watch out for 'strangers'. What grants them (labour) special access to strangers is not stated. By virtue of them being black an apparent assumption is that 'strangers' *too* are of 'their' own kind.

Conspicuous in the editorial, but also common in all others, is the discourse around governance. The style and tone (besides the subject and substance) of the editorials' references to government is shrill, strident and even unthinking. Racism in the usage of the term 'Government' is implied in its apparent deployment to highlight, implicitly, the ideological concept - 'black government'. This is achieved in several ways, including a litany of derogatory epithets and satire: 'ineffective', 'inability to deal with crime', 'sympathy for criminals', 'culpability', etc. The editorials carry express cynicism regarding government's initiatives and opinion, as well as clear misgivings about its effectiveness, capacity, and willingness to address the 'farm killings' situation. Their disdain for the government's capacity to provide effective governance (and thus protection) is hardly veiled:

> "The government's greatest culpability is its inability to deal with crime …, along with the lack of political will" (**Make a Plan**)

The responsibility for crime prevention is taken away from an 'inept black government' and is placed squarely on the shoulders of the 'citizens':

> "But the harsh and dreadful reality of *South Africa today* is that crime will only be turned back when the people of the country shoulder some responsibility." (emphasis added) (**Make a Plan**)

It is not said what 'South Africa today' actually means, but it is an oblique reference to the post-1994 elections South Africa. The editorial's attitude towards the government coincides with that of the dominant participants in the 'farm killings' discourse, namely, the SAAU, political opposition parties, and interviewed (white) relatives of the victims of the 'farm killings'. Somehow the editorials articulate the perspectives of these predominantly white institutions and sources. They do not engage with their interpretations, but only inflect them towards a judgement. For example, in an article

published in the same issue as the **Make a Plan** editorial, the SAAU's president is quoted expressing serious misgivings about a government report on the 'farm killings':

> "…the findings would have had more credibility if it was the result of a full judicial enquiry." (*Herald* 18/8/1998: 5).

In its reference to the report, the editorial found it important to refer to the report as a "*Government-sponsored* police report," instead of, for example, 'police report' or even an 'official report' (emphasis added). I have already looked at how the only seemingly positive reference to a 'government initiative' in **Summit of Sense** turns out to be a rendition of support for the DP's 'plan to end the killings'.

From the foregoing analysis, it emerges that while serious claims about important matters are made in the editorials, crucial evidence is conspicuous by its absence. The editorials rely on the authority embedded in their style of writing as the bases for the power and influence of their claims. They do not only identify themselves with whites, but also ideologically lump the government with blacks and define both outside of their ideological 'we' and 'us' pronouns. The editorials demonstrate little confidence in the government and various statements are aimed at undermining its ability, commitment, and even sincerity and integrity. They stop just short of an outright claim of collusion between the black government and black criminals. In their focus and emphasis, the editorial opinion takes its cues from the positions of the dominant positions in the discourse.

As indicated at the start of our analysis, the interrelation between the themes cannot be overemphasised, as together they constitute the 'farm killings' discourse.

Consequently, the following discussion of the editorials' view of crime reinforces several points that have been raised above.

1.2.3   View of crime

Here the focus is on the perspective that the editorials promoted and supported in relation to the 'farm killings' as a crime. In **National Crisis** a claim is made that:

> "If farmers feel unsafe, we will have a siege society developing, like that in Ian Smith's Rhodesia. We are dangerously close to that situation already."

Racist overtones in the editorial are heightened by its definition of the situation as "a siege society developing" and likening it to "that in Ian Smith's Rhodesia." The Rhodesian conflict of the 1980s was an anti-colonial struggle by predominantly black disenfranchised Zimbabweans against a white government. The editorial seems to be implying that what is similar between the two – the 'farm killings' and 'Ian Smith's Rhodesia' – is the 'racial' conflict, a black vs. white situation. A lack of confidence among some white citizens in South Africa in the capacity of a 'black government' is harnessed and promoted. Such lack of confidence is borne out in daily conversations through statements like, 'Just look north of the Limpopo (river)', 'black-on-black violence', 'we're becoming like the rest of Africa' etc. The Rhodesian reference seems to feed on these 'rich stereotypes': 'another black government' and the reported land expropriation in Zimbabwe are some of the angles the readers' 'scripts' provide to understand the analogy. This is the substance of van Zyl's (1987) argument in chapter two.

The 'brutality' and 'senselessness' of the crimes are consistently drawn upon to illuminate the seriousness of the crimes against the 'farmers', and provide *the* angle in

their reportage. None of the editorials engages with the socio-economic realities of the

country. Olivier (1994), in the second chapter attributes violence and crime to 'massive

unemployment and bad state of the economy'. The police have made several related

statements regarding the socio-economic dynamics:

> Farm attacks are not aimed exclusively at traditional white farmers …
> Various black farm owners have also been targeted relentlessly over the past
> couple of years. The work force also live in constant danger of being attacked
> and victimised by the criminal element involved in these attacks. (CIAC
> report p.1)

The report also says:

> These smallholdings (where attacks are usually launched) often border on
> informal settlements with high unemployment rates and where residents are
> exposed to poor economic conditions….. Furthermore, that the farming
> community have a greater tendency of storing large cash amounts in their
> homes and usually store a number of weapons … provides incentives for
> criminals. (CIAC report p.5)

These potential angles, in spite of their apparent significance in the police report do not

feature anywhere in the editorials. This does not mean that the editorials do not perform

their 'role' - 'explaining complex matters' – but that they do so from a particular point of

view of the crime which underpins the *Herald*'s construction of 'farm killings'. Hence,

any potential and competing explanations (e.g. of smallholdings as islands of abundance

in a sea of poverty) are downplayed in favour of certain ideologically significant views

(brutality, senselessness, anarchy, economic effects of crime).

A preponderant racist approach on the part of the editorials serves as the thread

connecting all the themes and elements discussed so far. In the current analysis, the

traditional stereotypical understanding of blacks as violent and thoughtless is harnessed

(see Hall 1997). The violence and assumed senselessness of the crimes constitute the

themes of the editorials' pseudo analysis of the 'farm killings'. In the process of constructing the 'farm killings' discourse, various forms of linguistic strategies are employed to strengthen the claims and arguments made by the editorials. The most critical of these is argumentation.

1.2.4 Argumentation

As I stated above, quoting Stonecipher (1979), editorial argumentation as a form of linguistic strategy strives to convince readers of the rightness of the position being advocated by logical force and even by emotion of expression. A quick look at the lexical choices (adjectives and evaluative language) that the editorials use to describe the perpetrators, victims, and reactions to the 'farm killings', clarifies this assertion:

> 'Tragic and horrific death toll', 'outrage over farm attacks', 'kindness to cowardly criminals', 'ineffective government response', 'vulnerable, weak and helpless on remote farms', 'Too many', 'Clearly there is'.

There is little doubt about the editorials' attempts to appeal to emotions. For short-term results, where ends may justify the means, an appeal is based upon fear and arousal (Stonecipher 1979). Such emotion-charged terms serve the purpose well, and the last paragraph in **A Final Option** specifies the 'means:'

> "It is time to offer the innocents sympathy and morality – and the worst to our worst killers the death penalty. The ball is, after all, in the criminal's court." (**A Final Option**)

The editorials use several textual signposts to highlight the logical structure of their expositions, for example:

> "Since then….."
> "As we report today, there has been an attack…"

"And there has been the shooting and wounding of …" (**National Crisis**)

The editorial closely connects several events involving attack on farmers even though they occur at different times and in different provinces in the country. The connection is made in spite of the police claim that "attacks on the farming community cannot be divorced from the general crime trends in the Province [of the Eastern Cape]" (CIAC report p.1). The treatment of 'farm killings' in isolation from the rest of the crime does not only provide the logical basis for making them more conspicuous both in discourse and mind, but also helps justify the editorials' attempts to seek to achieve priority status for the 'farm killings' regarding the commitment of law enforcement resources.

> "What the Government must understand is that at stake now is the whole future of farming in South Africa. *We* need *our* farmers and *we* need the produce of their farms." (emphasis added) (**National Crisis**)

The latter claim is self-evidently true, agricultural products are a source of life. The significance of the highlighted pronouns is their implication of the 'nation' in the ideological position of the 'we' to the extent that the 'nation' accepts the propositions. Within the economic context in which they are used, "… we need the produce of their farms," the pronouns transgress the 'race' boundaries set by their usage elsewhere in the discourse. Everyone needs to eat to survive and the 'inclusive' sense in which the pronouns are used serves to reinforce the editorials' effort to mobilise everyone behind the crusade to prioritise 'farm killings' over other murder crimes. In short, borrowing from Fiske (1996), recognising ourselves in the national 'we' interpellated here, we participate in the work of ideology by adopting the anti-'farm killings' subject position proposed for us. The message is, after all it is in everyone's interests that the 'Government must' stop the 'farm killings', or everyone faces grim economic

consequences. It is not unusual in the discourse that farmers are routinely presented as key players in commerce.

Various strategies are employed to underpin the authority with which the editorials speak. Their confidence is developed in a series of hypothetical predictions:

> "If farmers feel unsafe, we *will* have a siege society developing, like that in Ian Smith's Rhodesia." And,
> "Offering merciful solutions *will* do little to appease the rising tide of dissent." (emphasis added)

The same effect results from the consistent use of modal auxiliaries 'must' 'should' 'doesn't' to emphasise an 'obligation', 'desirability' and the 'truth' of their propositions (see Fowler 1991).

> "What the government *must* understand is that at stake now is the whole future of farming in South Africa." (emphasis added)

This analysis attempts to provide evidence of the flatulent argumentation used in the editorials. The editorials insist on a populist strategy by using an excessively emotional language aimed at whipping up emotions of the white people against the government, and black people using an emotional subject – the killings - as a stepping stone to achieve this goal. The little gesture to logic that some editorials make to support their crusade for the prioritisation of the 'farm killings' as a crime, does not go beyond a regurgitation of the claims of the dominant participants in the discourse. The editorials contain no evidence of research or insight into the killings within the context of their occurrence. Despite these shortcomings the editorials speak with a confidence and authority which effectively obscure their inadequacy.

1.2.5 Issue endorsement

Summit of Sense provides a useful example of an ostensible endorsement of a government plan and the actual endorsement of the DP's plan. The editorial's first reference to the summit states:

> "So his (Pres. Mandela's) call for a Summit to assess the situation should be met with positive co-operation from all interest groups…"

However the editorial suddenly assumes a more derogatory attitude:

> "… however frustrated some may feel about the ineffective response to their earlier calls for just such a meeting."

Any further reference to the government ceases and the rest of the editorial is taken over by a discussion of the "Democratic Party's … plan to end the killings." The DP is one of the major participants in the discourse on 'farm killings'. The editorial clearly endorses the party's 'plan'. An original report of the 'plan' came in the previous day's issue of the paper under the headline **'Latest attack sparks outrage'.** While commending the DP's package as 'plausible', the editorial cautions that it is likely to be impeded by "red tape," a loose reference to government bureaucracy. An implication is that the hope brought about by the DP's 'plan' will be dashed by an uncommitted, ineffective government and its bureaucracy.

In **A Final Option** an attempt is made to convince the readers about the rightfulness of the death penalty. After the opening, the editorial offers a gesture to fairness citing the country's constitution. This is however the editorial's own way of disarming any opposition to the issue it endorses – the death penalty.

> "In terms of South Africa's unquestionably noble constitution, everyone has a right to life"

However several suggestive statements follow:

> "Offering merciful solutions will do little to appease the rising tide of dissent"
> "Offering kindness to cowardly killers as those who took a life and shattered many others through the vile and purposeless terror attack at Planet Hollywood on the Cape Town waterfront, does not sit well with a nation that is outraged and hurting."

Putting aside the association drawn by the editorial between 'farm killings' and the Planet Hollywood attack, it 'authoritatively' aligns any form of punishment less than the death penalty with 'mercy' and 'kindness', which it claims are unacceptable to 'a nation'.

Unnamed "various surveys" are quoted in the narrative of the editorial in support of the death penalty. The editorial also strategically and cunningly quotes the former minister of Water Affairs, Kader Asmal, as 'admitting' to the wide support that this option enjoys:

> "Just as … Asmal admitted that a referendum would be supported, but it would, he said, prejudice the Bill of rights"

The juxtaposition of 'Asmal's admission' and the supportive "various surveys" creates an impression that the editorial's advocacy for the death sentence represents Asmal's position as indicated by his 'admission', the details of which are excluded. It is significant that the Asmal reference ends so abruptly. The Bill of Rights to which he is said to refer guarantees many rights and among these is the right to own property. In spite of the racially disproportionate ownership of property in the country there has never been any talk of subjecting this right to a referendum. Could Asmal have been referring to this? The editorial maintains a 'strategic silence' on the issue, leaving the matter unexplained. Asmal's ostensible support for the death penalty precedes a reference to Mandela's opposition to the death sentence, creating an impression of lack of co-ordination and inconsistency on the part of government. Mandela's claim that there is no proof that the death sentence brought the crime rate down is summarily dismissed:

"But that is not a proven fact."

Without citing proof of its own other than, "that is simple common sense," the editorial

goes on to make a significant claim of its own:

> "What is indisputable is that there is, and can be no greater deterrent [than the
> death penalty]."

Consensus of the innocents is invoked:

> "It is time to offer the innocent sympathy and morality – and the worst to our
> worst killers the death penalty."

The ideological term 'sympathy' once again crops up following its strategic use in a

previous editorial:

> Too many amnesties, easy bail, soft sentences, early parole, and reluctance to
> upgrade our rag-tag police force, have left a feeling that official sympathy
> remains in favour of criminals. (**Final Option**)

The government is cautioned to stop 'sympathising' with criminals and to start

'sympathising' with the 'innocents' (law abiding citizens).

The editorials' issue endorsement provide another opportunity for them to

reiterate their determined oppositional attitude towards government and their close

relationship with the dominant participants in the discourse. No bases are provided for

their suspicion, and wholesale rejection of government initiatives except a litany of

derogatory epithets – indicating the chronic bankruptcy of their 'arguments'. The support

for the 'DP's plan to end the killings' seems to be nothing more than publicity for the

party as it is an exact reproduction of the previous day's report, sourced from a 'DP

spokesman' without any additional information on the 'plan'.

1.3 Conclusion

A fruitful analysis of the 'farm killings' discourse presupposes a broad approach which, while focussing on the various articles, also takes into account the social context of their production. Cognisant of this point, our discussion is punctuated by deliberate attempts to demonstrate the intertextuality of the 'farm killings' discourse and its relevance to the historical context of its production. There is very little difference between the editorials and the articulations of the dominant participants in the discourse. The only slight difference is, once again, the deliberate attempt on the part of the editorials to inflect the positions towards a judgement. This is evident in the use of language in the editorials.

In the above analysis I attempt to look at the ideological signification in the editorials as a 'separate genre' in news writing. Several points emerge as significant themes. Let us look at these individually and remark on each.

- *Racism*: in their mirroring of the racism and the one-sidedness of the *Herald*'s general discourse on 'farm killings', the editorials adopt a thinly veiled racist approach in their representation of the killings. An apparent obsession with the violence involved in the commission of the crimes, as well as quick fix punitive measures drew attention away from underlying social causes of the crime. Without any insight into the 'causes', the acts became indicative of the personal inadequacy of the perpetrators. There is utter silence in the discourse regarding the suffering of the other 'race' groups whom the police have designated also as 'victims' of the killings. The *Herald*'s 'farm killings' discourse is a 'whites only discourse'.

- *Demarcation of participation in the 'farm killings' discourse according to 'race'*: I revisit this point more comprehensively below. It is a reference to the creation of the 'we' and 'them' signification, predicated on 'race' in the discourse. Within the

discourse, the polarisation of opinion is based on 'race'. The editorials' approach heightens these divisions by their own racist participation in the discourse.

- *The impoverishment of the editorials' 'argument'*: the editorials make no substantive contribution to the discourse, they do not engage with the issues underlying or relevant to the killings, but deal with the events in ways which hardly deviate from the 'hard news' style. Consequently, their claimed 'educational' and 'interpretative' values are minimal.

- *Low opinion of the government*: The editorials' disrespect for the government is hardly veiled. Several derogatory and sweeping statements about the government are made without any constructive engagement with the government on the issue of crime prevention. An official report on the killings was issued in August, but none of the editorials engages with it critically. It is only mentioned in passing in one of them.

- *The editorials' close relationship with the dominant participants*: it is not difficult to identify a close relationship between the editorials and the dominant white participants in the discourse, as the editorials take it upon themselves to amplify their positions and statements. Definitions of the 'farm killings', issue endorsement, as well as the focus and emphasis in the editorials bear testimony to this relationship.

These observations are common to all four editorials.

The next chapter is an analysis of the news articles. While it is presented as a separate analysis, there will be frequent references to the preceding analysis of the editorials marking what Deacon et al (1999), refer to as intertextual relations between articles.

Chapter 5.

Ideological analysis – news articles

1. Ideological analysis of the *Herald*'s news articles.

In this chapter the focus is on the 'other type of content' of a newspaper, the 'straight news content'. However, as was the case with the editorials, the analysis of the news articles is heralded by a brief discussion of two perspectives of 'news' – news as information and news as representation. For our purposes here, the discussion is tailored to fit the 'deviation' from the theoretical assumptions of this study announced at the start of the previous chapter. This chapter is divided into three major parts covering the two perspectives mentioned above and also the empirical part – an ideological analysis of news articles. The same thematic approach used in the previous analysis is employed here, where key elements of the articles are identified and used to facilitate the analysis. As was the case in chapter 4, this chapter begins with the deviation - news as information.

1.1 News as information – a normative view

A stated earlier, within the normative view, a particular image and conception of news as 'information' is foregrounded. This is an important view especially as it has acquired for itself a natural character. We read newspapers to access important information about the world. In this section I go into this view, looking at its postulates and implications. I begin with an attempt at defining news.

1.1.1　Understanding 'news'

I, earlier on, alluded to the ubiquity and influence of the media in our lives. It is therefore ironic that within the journalism literature there is not an accepted, clear definition of one of the media's main products - news. This is so because news by its nature cannot be defined. To seek an infallible formula that will predict what events will become news is futile because the circumstances governing its selection are never constant: what is news at present may not be news in the next hour (Whitaker 1981). Nonetheless, we can safely say that news is not an event, not the actual happening, but an account of that happening (Bond 1969). The implication is that everyday a journalist must make choices about what the readers want or need to know (Lanson & Stephens 1994). As Crump (1974) puts it, the reporter becomes the interpreter or translator linking words and actions of diverse groups of people (police, government) with the 'average' newspaper reader.

To be able to decide which of the flood of world events (potential news) are worth pursuing, which aspects of these events they should focus on, journalists require a skill known as 'news judgement'. An examination of news judgement can help us understand the process by which events are transformed into news and thus what news is. Lanson & Stephens' (1994) 'news elements' provide pointers towards what is news:

- Impact - the number of people affected by an event.
- Weight – the seriousness of an event.
- Controversy – news loves arguments, charges and all-out fights.
- Emotions – stories involving children, weak persons and human interest.
- Unusual – unexpected events.
- Prominence – events involving well-known people.
- Proximity – readers are interested in places and people they know.
- Timeliness – news must be new.
- Currency – news must take into account what's on people's minds.
- Usefulness – news should help answer basic questions about daily lives.
- Educational value – stories educate in addition to informing.

The more inclusive an event is of the above elements, the more likely it will be news.

In contradistinction to the reference to editorials as 'interpretations', news articles are referred to as 'straight news'. The reasons for this 'segregated content' were mentioned in chapter five. In Kieram's (1997) words, it is intrinsic to the purpose of news that it is free of ideology. A reporter, guarding a reputation as an unbiased observer must attribute any opinions, any subjective comments that appear in the news story (Lanson & Stephens 1994). Other important principles in news writing include *fairness* in dealing with sources and in reporting, as well as *accuracy* i.e. being truthful both in the gathering and presentation of facts and information (Goodwin 1983).

Once the 'facts' have been 'gathered', they are packaged in accordance with specific journalistic requirements. The placement of 'issues' in the story serves as an important indicator of their importance. A brief look at the structure of news illuminates this point.

1.1.2   The structure of a 'news' story

Journalistic stories, Crump (1974) argues, can and do follow numerous formats but one is basic – the 'inverted pyramid' – because it presents pertinent facts in the earliest paragraphs. Bond (1969) identifies three important parts of a news story and their functions, namely: headline (tells us quickly what the story covers), first paragraph (tells the main facts of the story), and the remainder of the story (contains supporting information). This is one significant difference between stories and editorials. This difference extends beyond the news structure to the use of language in the news. The language of news stories is clear, precise, concise and direct, using a distinct grammar – active voice, direct quotations, subject and verb – and avoiding dallying and varnished words (Lanson & Stephens 1994; Crump 1974). However, there are potential pitfalls in

the claims mentioned above. Some of these suit the objective of this section and looking

at them could be useful for its purpose.

1.1.3   A critical look at the 'news' and its production

In the preceding sections, I mention several requirements of news stories, which imply

that reporters must balance the need to answer readers' questions against the need to

communicate clearly in a limited space (Lanson & Stephens 1994). Journalism thus

becomes:

> …a process of elimination. Any event significant or interesting enough to be
> labelled news, trails behind it an almost endless train of circumstances and
> ramifications…. But though it can be painful to realise, many of [the] hard-
> won points simply won't fit in the story. (Lanson & Stephens 1994)

Another dimension to this problem emanates from the fact that journalists do their work

under very demanding deadlines. Come the deadline for filing a story, the reporter must

have checked the facts, talked to the people concerned, and have put together the account

in a readable form (Hodgson 1992). The pressure to get the news out to the public while

it is still fresh causes errors (Goodwin 1983). The facts that journalists can produce

sometimes add-up to the 'truth', but journalists are seldom able to put sufficient facts

together at a given time to be able to tell the 'truth' (Goodwin 1983).

The circumstances of news production render the journalistic claim of

objectivity difficult to sustain. For one reason, the very act of news selection involves a

bias towards a certain content (Hodgson 1992). Whitaker (1981) comments on the news

selection and organisation processes as follows:

- Selection involves isolating an event in time, abstracting some information while
  omitting unnoticed information about the event.

- Organisation on the other hand means that observers must use their judgment and opinion in deciding what the "event" is, what is relevant, and using language to describe it.

Secondly, objectivity is positively dangerous: it provides no safeguards against a supply of news that is shaped by forces outside a journalist's control. Unproven statements can easily be made into 'facts' by attributing them to a source (Whitaker 1981).

Both the claims and the criticism expressed above notwithstanding, the ideological critique of news looks beyond its 'technical packaging'. One important observation about the foregoing discussion is, following Hall (1996), that it assumes there is an 'event' first, and then it can be 'accurately' and 'objectively' reported. Hall (1996) makes a much more subtle point about language. His argument is that the 'event' may be there, but it can only become *meaningful* through its representation in language. For him language does not come *after* the 'event' but is *constitutive* of how we are to make sense of it. This critique maintains that language is not a neutral medium, that values and implicit propositions are continuously articulated as discourse on a subject proceeds, so that a discourse is always a representation from a certain point of view (Fowler 1991). Once again, this theory of representation is as valid for Hulteng's 'straight news' as it is for editorials. In the following section I look at news as a representation, a view which provides a comprehensive critique of the normative view.

1.2 News as representation – a critique of the normative view

It might be helpful to begin our discussion of this critique by emphasising the major difference between the 'two types of content' introduced in the previous chapter - editorials and news - and its implication for ideological analysis. Editorials' main task is

to perform a mediating job between the 'objective' news and a newspaper's ideology (Laitin & Rodriguez Gomez 1992). As Hall et al (1981) put it, editorials inflect themes already present in the first-order news presentation towards a judgement. This, as well as the textual strategies which foreground the speech act of offering values and beliefs in editorials, are what distinguish editorials from 'straight news' and lend themselves well to ideological analysis (Fowler 1991). It follows therefore, that the 'factual' approach employed in news, predicated on the notion of 'reflection' of what reporters 'gather' may not be as amenable to analysis. However, a useful approach to the analysis of news articles is provided by viewing 'objectivity' in news writing as an ideological claim. To illuminate this, a discussion of news articles as a journalistic genre might be helpful.

1.2.1 The news genre as a form of representation

Some of the significant elements of news are mentioned above in the discussion of the nature (objectivity, fairness, balance) and structure of news (brevity, inverted pyramid). In this section I attempt to dig into the ideological nature of these elements which mark the journalistic exposition called 'news'. While some of the arguments here were raised earlier (see chapter 3), it might be helpful to revisit them to herald the ensuing analysis.

At the base of the claim that news is ideological, is the idea that news is a 'constructed representation', not a 'gathered reflection'. As I argue below, this notion avails us of various dimensions in the analysis of 'news' which are inaccessible from the point of view of 'news gathering and reporting'. Its main strength is in its ability to go beyond such 'crude' notions of conscious conspiracy and bias implied in the above critique (Cameron 1996). MacDougall's (1968) point that the billions of everyday

occurrences in the world cannot be news until some purveyor of news gives an account of them is always a good starting point for this kind of argument.

In news the criteria of brevity, conciseness, clarity, preferred grammar, consistency, liveliness and vigour, are framed as purely functional or aesthetic judgements (Cameron 1996). Alongside these is a concentration on verifiable figures and quotations from official, political sources, the 'impartiality' entailed in the coverage of 'both sides' and the 'professionalism' which 'guarantees' that selection and coverage of stories is adequate (Jensen 1987). This style is particularly well suited to the prevailing ideology of modern news reporting as simply 'holding a mirror to the world', and it is not coincidental that this style is most strictly adhered to in news rather than feature items (Cameron 1996). Cameron (1996) develops the point further:

> The use of a plain, terse, concrete language in news items – a language that deliberately aims to draw attention to itself as a language – is a code, not unlike the code of realism in fiction, and what it conventionally signifies is unmediated access to the objective facts of a story. (1996: 327)

What I am trying to highlight here is that the outward form or genre of news appears to support the press's traditional claims to objectivity (Jensen 1987). On closer examination, however, it turns out that these stylistic values are not timeless and neutral, rather they play a role in constructing a relationship with a specific imagined audience, and also in sustaining a particular ideology of news reporting (Cameron 1996). These stylistic values according to Cameron (1996) provide the linguistic analogue of the camera that never lies, and should be treated with similar suspicion.

> It [plain language] implicitly conveys to us, in a way a less self-effacing kind of language could not readily hope to do, that what we are reading is not really a representation at all: it is the simple truth. (Cameron 1996: 327)

In keeping with this argument, as well as Fowler's (1991) position on the ideological nature of language quoted elsewhere in the study, the following analysis attempts to demonstrate that linguistic representations always embody a point of view. That even the most 'natural' and seemingly artless discourse is not free, and in principle cannot be free, from ideological presuppositions (Cameron 1991). That means:

> All journalism, including objective reporting, is a creative and imaginative work, a symbolic strategy; journalism sizes up situations, names their elements, structure their outstanding ingredients, and names them in a way that contains an attitude toward them. (Carey in Wilkins & Patterson 1987: 81)

While the stories are technically written in classic 'objective' style, the following analysis attempts to go beyond the patina of fairness, objectivity and impartiality to demonstrate their ideological inflection.

1.3 Ideological analysis of the *Herald*'s news articles

With close on 40 articles to be analysed, it may not be practicable to write up separate analyses of each article in this study. I thus adopted the following approach: all the articles were thoroughly read, identifying and categorising key elements and themes for analysis. The criterion for the identification was the ideological significance of those elements. The following categories thus emerged:

- Headlines.
- Frequency in the occurrence of 'farm killings'.
- Racism and the creation of the 'we' and 'them'.
- Participation in the discourse.
- Participants' positions and positioning in the discourse – the generation of consensus.
- Angles and style in the stories – the view of crime.
- I also identify the 'blindspot' of the 'farm killings' discourse.

The ensuing analysis is structured along these themes as areas of focus. The examples cited constitute samples of the issues referred to. I start with headlines.

1.3.1   Headlines

Headlines generally perform three main functions: they serve a fundamental framing function and can be used to upgrade or downgrade topics; they draw the readers attention and; they serve as guides to the themes implicit in a story (Hall et al 1981; van Dijk 1991). Goshorn & Gandy (1995) make a useful addition to these functions: that headlines may influence how the story will be understood and stored for later use in making sense of similar events and issues. Let us see how these functions apply to the 'farm killings' headlines in the *Herald*, starting with the upgrading/downgrading function:

Headline *A,

<div align="center">

Five murdered in two days as killing spree continues unabated
SAAU demand action on farm attack crisis

</div>

<div align="right">

(*Herald* 01/08/1998)

</div>

Headline *B,

<div align="center">

President's office reacts to Greeff's plea
'Mandela cares about farmers'

</div>

<div align="right">

(*Herald* 03/08/1998)

</div>

Headline *C,

<div align="center">

Intelligence reports say crime is motive for rural attacks
Farm killings 'not political'

</div>

<div align="right">

(*Herald*, 08/08/1998)

</div>

Headline *A announces what the SAAU defines as a 'crisis', and a demand for action following the murder of a number of people in a short space of time. The 'news value' of the story is augmented by the counter-positioning of several aspects in the headline which are highlighted as themes implicit in the story: successive killings, the demand for action and the prevalence of a 'crisis'. It is the latter point that is of importance at the moment. It is the SAAU which has defined the 'farm attacks' as having 'reached crisis proportions'.

The headline keeps this definition out of the quotation marks signalling its concurrence with it. Consequently 'crisis' becomes an unequivocal, uncontested definition of the 'farm killings': a fact. Following van Dijk's (1991), this is the newspaper's own way of upgrading topics. The same term appears in the following issue of the paper in an editorial headlined **National Crisis**. The 'farm killings' had become a 'crisis'.

The headline employs what Hall et al (1981) call a 'statistical tactic', quoting verifiable numbers, as its reinforcement of the 'crisis' conception. Facts do not come harder than numbers. Numbers provide 'concrete evidence' of the prevalence of the crisis. Direct or indirect 'flashbacks' are used with consistency in the 'farm killings' discourse to sustain the link between the events while grouping them together as an 'isolated' criminal entity. Besides reinforcing the 'crisis' view, another significant outcome is the legitimisation of a priority status that the killings 'deserve' and for which the *Herald* so vehemently argues through the discourse. The statistics are an 'evidence' which supports the necessity for 'action' against 'farm killings', while heightening public awareness and thus opposition to the killings. The headline relegates into insignificance the police and the government statements that the 'farm killings' are not the only killings. That is its contribution to a particular construction of the 'farm killings' discourse.

Another term which can be easily overlooked in the headline is 'farm killings' itself. A police report shows that more than 30% of the people 'targeted' on farms are either 'black', 'coloured' or Asian. However throughout the discourse the subjects of the 'farm killings' articles are white with one exception – a fleeting reference to an assault of a farm domestic worker. In spite of this heavy inflection to refer to white farm owners, the term 'farm killings' is used without quotation marks. This is highly ideological.

'Farm killings' have come to refer to the killing of white farmers and their relatives, and not that of anyone else on the farms. The 'upgrading' of this reference promotes an understanding of the term to be a reference to these types of killings.

Headlines *B and *C, on the other hand, make use of quotation marks around certain selected texts. Van Dijk (1991) attributes this to an attempt to indicate distance or suspension of belief. It is significant that the headlines wherein this strategy is used refer to the government. The headlines doubt the authenticity of the claims made and lead the readers in the same direction. The downgrading of the topics is effected through the use of quotation marks around the 'disputed' texts. A conclusion that can be drawn is that the *Herald* resists and marginalises competing definition/s of the 'farm killings'. As I elaborate on this claim below, for the *Herald* there *is* a *crisis* and the discourse is punctuated by persistent calls for action on the part of government and the 'nation'.

The 'farm killings' stories come under striking banner and marked typeface headlines which exploit the violence in the commission of the crimes. The headlines are pointedly sensationalising with the sole aim of attracting people's attention through shock tactics in order to sell more newspapers. They dramatise the 'farm killings', making extensive use of reinforcing words like 'shock', 'fear', 'horror'.

Headline *D

<div align="center">

Police fear terrified victims were still alive as they were set alight

Grisly   Farm   Murders

</div>

<div align="right">(*Herald* 10/8/1998: 1)</div>

Headline *E

<div align="center">

Pastor describes the chilling last moments of the dying victims

Horror tale of the Farm Murders

</div>

<div align="right">(*Herald* 11/8/1998: 1)</div>

Headline *F

<div align="center">

Friend shocked, outraged at yet another brutal E Cape farm slaying

</div>

<div align="right">(*Herald* 28/8/1998: 1)</div>

To heighten the drama, the headlines go for the most troubling sensational aspects of the crimes (Headline *D highlighting a *presumed* burning of people, and headline *E bringing a Pastor into the 'horror'). Headline *D's story does not provide any bases for the enigmatic 'fear' that the victims were alive when they were set alight. The police are quoted as saying they would be investigating the possibility. So why does the headline highlight this gruesome unsubstantiated detail? The short answer is – to heighten the drama. The 'farm killings' headlines are consistently thematised around these troubling concerns. This is not without purpose. Hall et al's (1981) comment on the special status of violence as a news value contextualises this heightened focus on violence:

> Any crime can be lifted into news visibility if violence becomes associated with it, since violence is perhaps the supreme example of news value 'negative consequences'. … It thus represents a fundamental rupture in the social order. The use of violence marks the distinction between those who are fundamentally *of* society and those who are *outside* it. It is coterminous with the boundary of 'society' itself. (1981: 67-8)

This comment introduces another potential theme: the definition of the boundaries of a 'society' and thus of a 'nation', and implies the creation of the 'we' and 'them' discourse. I shall return to this theme later. For now I develop our argument around the creation of a crisis perception and the 'farm killings' from another angle.

1.3.2   Frequency in the occurrence of 'farm killings'

In this section I attempt to bring out the *Herald*'s way of justifying the 'crisis'. I have already identified the fact that the term 'belongs' to the SAAU and was adopted and upgraded by the *Herald*. The following analysis centres on this co-operation between the paper and some of the participants in the discourse in developing the 'crisis' conception.

A 'crisis' conjures up images of a situation getting out of hand – a complete problem. In an effort to provide evidence of a 'crisis' the *Herald* adopts several strategies. Let us look at the various strategies adopted to support the 'crisis' view.

1.3.2.1   Frequent occurrence

A picture of 'farm killings' as a frequent occurrence is created. This is effected through the sustenance of the discourse. On average more than one-and-a-half stories a day, were published in August 1998, excluding Sundays when the paper does not publish. This figure does not include all court cases on 'farm killings' as well as all stories which do not include a direct reference to 'farm killings', even if these can be understood to be about 'farm killings'. Of the 42 'farm killings' articles published, four were editorials. This carries heavy ideological significance on its own: "… the decision to produce an editorial at all is some indication of the significance accorded such stories by a newspaper" (Hall et al 1981: 89). As I demonstrate in the previous analysis of editorials, the *Herald* took the opportunity to make serious judgements about the 'farm killings' in its editorials, sending strong messages to the 'Government' and the 'nation'. It only reinforces the point that several repetitions occur in the stories. Without any new material, the motivation for the inclusion of the stories in the paper seems to be the establishment of the 'norm' of the discourse. Gerbner, in a video address, refers to this as 'cultivation' - a continual nourishment of values such that they are naturalised, in other words, building and maintaining stable images of life and society driven by the everyday flow of communication. A comparison, for instance, of the following stories bears this point out:

<p style="text-align:center">Five murdered in two days as killing spree continues unabated</p>

<p style="text-align:center">SAAU demand action on farm attack crisis</p>

<p style="text-align:right">*Herald* 1/8/1998)</p>

<p style="text-align:center">Viljoen to seek talks with Mbeki on farmers' security</p>

<p style="text-align:right">*Herald* 3/8/1998</p>

<p style="text-align:center">Union wants meeting with Mandela on farm killings</p>

<p style="text-align:right">*Herald* 14/8/1998</p>

Others seemed to play an outright canvassing role:

<p style="text-align:center">Huge turnout expected for funeral</p>

<p style="text-align:right">*Herald* 12/8/1998</p>

and,

<p style="text-align:center">Protest looms as fury mounts</p>

<p style="text-align:right">*Herald* 12/8/1998</p>

In terms of the structure of the latter story, the fury is attributable to a statement by the SAAU that: "Our planned campaign against the rural slaughter is gaining momentum, with more and more organisations expressing their support."

1.3.2.2   Overplay of statistics

The second strategy used to heighten the seriousness of the 'farm killings' is an overplay of statistics as well as a careful use of words which signify continuity of the 'farm killings' both in the headlines and in the stories. An example is provided by Headline *A above. Other relevant examples include:

Example *1

> "The SAAU on Friday said that *since the beginning of 1994 more than 554 people had been killed* in *unabated* farm attacks, and the situation on farms was careering towards anarchy.
> According to the SAAU *18 people had been killed since the beginning of July in 49 attacks,* and *since January at least 90 members of the farming community died in 427 attacks* on farms countrywide.
> Last year, *470 attacks on farms occurred in which 142 people died*."
>
> <p style="text-align:right">(Emphasis added) (Abstracted from *Herald* 3/8/1998)</p>

Example *2

<p style="text-align:center">*Latest* Attack sparks outrage</p>

<p style="text-align:right">(Emphasis added) (*Herald* 19/8/1998)</p>

Example *3
Friend shocked, outraged at *yet another* brutal E Cape farm slaying
(Emphasis added) (*Herald* 28/8/1998)

1.3.2.3 Overplay of violence

Assisting the above strategies is an overplay of violence in the 'farm killings' articles. I have already discussed the significance of violence in news above. Here I can simply mention the effect of the violence on the articles i.e. giving them more impact and conspicuousness. In addition, the positioning of the stories in the paper is also important. Most of the stories made the first page and were given the best play possible, splashed over a considerably large part of the page with vivid, on-the-scene colour photographs.

The impact of a combination of these factors is drawn upon to create a 'crisis' conception. The quoted figures of the total number of 'members of the farming community killed' include all categories of people, not only white. They are cleverly used for the sole purpose of reinforcing the discourse's central message that there is a 'crisis'. The 'crisis' picture is painted irrespective of:

a) the police's insistence that the farm killings cannot be separated from the general crime trends in the country (see CIAC farm killings report) and,

b) the government's reported claim that "… not only farmers were being killed… many people die in the townships daily, but their deaths were not reported." (*Herald* 3/8/1998).

Stuart Hall's discussion of the 'defining' power of violence above, is an important one. The next section looks at the ideological use of the 'we' and 'them' in the discourse.

1.3.3   'Racism' and the creation of the 'we' and 'them'

As I discuss below in the 'angles' section, most of the 'farm killings' articles foreground the violence used in the murders consistently using savage epithets:

**"Grisly," "terrified," "horror," "chilling,"
"emotional," "outrage," "shock," "cold blood."**

Following Hall et al's (1981) point that the use of violence marks the distinction between

those who are fundamentally *of* society and those who are *outside* it, the representation

immediately defines the perpetrators as out of 'society'. The perpetrators of violence thus

assume the position defined by the 'them' – 'antisocial people at the mercy of

uncontrollable instincts' as I expand below. Logically, the 'we' would signify the law-

abiding citizens irrespective of who they are. However, the *Herald*'s 'them' and 'we'

references are loaded with racist overtones. The following examples and subsequent

analysis bears out this assertion.

Example *4
> There must now be concrete action from the side of the government, and also
> from our own side, General Viljoen said.
>> (*Herald* 3/8/1998)

Example*5
> The couple's son Fred Greeff, who said he did not want revenge for his
> parent's death, recently made an impassioned plea to Mr [former Pres.
> Nelson] Mandela, asking: "Fred Greeff wants to know what's going on…
> What is his feeling on us whites who are being killed?"
>> (*Herald* 3/8/1998)

Example *6
> The son of Grahamstown farmer George Wylie yesterday called on the black
> community to "show solidarity" and openly condemn the spate of farm
> killings in South Africa.
> I challenge them to come forward and join us, said Peter Wylie
> This is a racist issue – black criminals attacking white farmers. Is it not a
> farmer's right to grow old on his farm?
>> (*Herald* 31/8/1998)

Example *7
> Mr Wylie said the police were giving farm murders more priority than the
> government was.
> Blacks must not remain silent on this issue.
>> (*Herald* 31/8/1998)

These examples are statements by the different participants in the *Herald*'s 'farm killings' discourse. The *Herald* did not 'generate' these statements. Following the discussion in chapter three, the *Herald* constructed the articles which contained these statements. Our understanding of the 'farm killings' are *shaped* by the way in which the *Herald* 'represents' and thus 'make sense' of these statements for the reader. In keeping with our discussion above, what becomes the *Herald*'s 'farm killings' discourse is a result of structural production features such as 'news gathering' and news construction. The point here is that the analysis of these statements locates them as part of the overall discourse, without qualifying them as the personal opinion of the speakers. This is in part an acknowledgement of the active role of journalists in the construction of news – identifying, selecting, emphasising – issues (see Hall et al 1981). Their close resemblance to the discourse in the editorials vindicates this treatment.

The police say 'everyone' on the farms is 'targeted'. The government has made a similar point. The East Cape Agricultural Union chairman is reported to have said:

> All South Africans are being held to ransom by murderers and criminals and our system clearly does not work. We need a system that does…. The issue is not just about farmers and farm workers, but about crime in general in South Africa (*Herald* 29/8/1998).

While it might not be difficult to identify racism in examples *4 to *7, as I elaborate hereunder, a caveat is in order. Racism in the discourse is not always as vulgar as the examples suggest, it is woven seamlessly into the continuous flow of the discourse on 'farm killings'. This is the overall point of the analysis. This argument highlights the intertextuality of the discourse as a key analytic feature. While the examples directly refer to 'race' and seem to be straightforward statements, they owe much of their meaning to the overall discourse. They cannot be read in isolation, but in the context of their

articulation – the 'farm killings' discourse. They simply mention what prevails ubiquitously in the discourse. I return to this point at the conclusion of this section.

The *Herald* constructs the 'farm killings' as a racist issue. They are not part of the 'bigger picture of crime' in the country, but dramatised accounts of a racist onslaught on the white 'nation'. The farm workers are nonentities and they do not feature in the discourse except as 'outsiders'. The *Herald*'s 'national crisis' conception is informed by this view. 'Nation' is used in a narrow and exclusive sense to signify a white 'nation'. Example *4 refers to 'the side of government, and also our own side', signifying a division. Example *5 refers to 'us whites who are being killed'. The insinuation is 'us' (whites) being killed by 'them' (blacks). The 'black government' in both examples is lumped together with 'blacks', the perpetrators by commission ('black criminals', see Example *6), or omission (claim of the governments culpability in the editorials). Thus the 'we' and 'them' in the *Herald*'s 'farm killings' discourse come to signify the definition of blacks as 'criminals' helped by a conniving government.

In his study of stereotypical representations of black people, Bogle identifies what he calls 'Bad Bucks' to refer to - no good, violent, renegades, on the rampage and full of black rage, violent and frenzied black youths (Hall 1997: 251). Following Bogle, I view the overplay of violence in the articles about the crimes accompanied by the use of the term 'youths', as ideological.

> "Mr Peinaar managed to overpower two of the youths before he was stabbed
> in the back by the third suspect" (*Herald* 14/8/1998: 2).

Throughout the political struggles in South Africa the term 'youths' has been a central one for 'good' and 'bad' reasons. It was used by the apartheid government to discredit and negate the struggle against apartheid. By playing down the inclusivity of the struggle

and playing the 'youth card' in the discourse on the struggle, it appears that the
government's intention was to associate the political activities with the adventure,
experimentation, immaturity and the general zealotry of the youth. On the other hand, the
energy, awareness and activism of the youth constituted the axis of the struggle. In the
process the term accumulated a massive ideological signification and became closely
associated with black anger, savagery and anarchism. Its use in the 'farm killings'
discourse is enough to conjure up the images of a racist onslaught reminiscent of the
'total onslaught', and in the process define the 'war boundaries' by ascribing a racist
character to the 'farm killings'. Hence:

> "General Viljoen said on Saturday, the systematic massacre of farmers in a
> manner which reminded [sic] strongly of 'revolutionary terrorism' had
> reached a stage where action was being demanded by everyone." (*Herald*
> 3/8/1998)

Already the citations made in the analysis thus far seem to suggest a trend in the
'participation' in the *Herald*'s 'farm killings' discourse. The next section pursues this.

1.3.4   Participation in the discourse

An important ideological element of news discussed above, relates to the journalistic
claim of 'objectivity' and 'fairness' – covering 'both sides' of the story. The analysis in
this section and in the following one pose a challenge to this claim – by attempting to
reveal the ideological nature of the claim. Let us start by looking at the list of significant
'participants' in the 'farm killings' discourse:

1) SAAU – defined *by* the *Herald* as "predominantly Afrikaans" (19/8/1998: 8)
2) Democratic Party (DP) – predominantly white
3) National Party (NP) - predominantly white
4) Freedom Front (FF) - predominantly white
5) Conservative Party - predominantly white
6) East Cape Agricultural Union
7) Police

8) Relatives of the murdered farmers – all white
9) The National Maize Producers' Organisation
10) Other farmers and anonymous sources - white
11) The Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) – predominantly black
12) The Government – predominantly black
13) ANC – predominantly black

The participants do not all simultaneously participate in every story. For example the IFP and the ANC contributed in only one**: Protest looms as fury mounts** (*Herald* 12/8/1998). The discourse consistently dominated by the FF, DP, NP and the SAAU. Definitions of the 'farm killings' (as a 'crisis') and attitude towards the government (as 'ineffective'), are shared between the *Herald* and all these organisations. In several instances the articles refer to the government, and even point an accusing finger, without any response being reported from the government.

Lest this be construed as an argument against the claim of 'reporting both sides of the story' I must emphasise that if there is any resemblance to that, it is accidental. I believe that the argument relating to 'the other side of the story' obtains in the 'farm killings' discourse. My view is informed by the vagueness inherent in the notion of 'other side of the story'. It is difficult to identify the 'other side' – is it a second opinion even if in agreement?, is it actively searching for a dissenting or different opinion even if there is 'none'? On the bases of this vagueness, I do not engage the presence or absence of the 'other side' in the discourse. A crime is committed, the police provide the 'facts', political parties comment, as do the victims sometimes and so does the government, so what is the point here? The point is the *domination* of the discourse by certain organisations. Let us look at how this domination is effected, as well as its ideological implications. I also search for the possible reasons for this state of affairs.

1.3.5 Participants' positions and positioning in the discourse – the generation of consensus

One main result of the consistency in 'participation' in the discourse by the specified organisations is a *consensus* in the 'farm killings' discourse. For instance, the 'crisis' definition of the 'farm killings' stuck as did the definition of the government as an '*ineffective*' institution. The discourse almost unanimously identifies a serious need to address the '*law and order problem*' in a country besieged by '*lawlessness*'. Sporadic disruptions of this consensus did occur but as I demonstrate below these were immediately drowned in a loud chorus of disapproval.

There is differential treatment of the various positions introduced into the discourse by the various participants, apparently depending on their congruence with the established consensus. Some positions survive, and some are obscured and even dropped. The picture emanating from the general drift of the discourse is that of issues and explanations as uncontroversial and unequivocal, and within the parameters of the consensus. Let us start by looking at this consensual definition of the 'farm killings'. As we have seen above, the SAAU is the first in the month to introduce the term 'crisis' to define the killings. Less than two weeks after the story is published, the *Herald* writes an editorial with the headline **National crisis** (*Herald* 12/8/1998). On the same day the National Party recites the 'crisis' definition in a contribution to a 'farm killings' story. The DP completes the circle with a statement which, although it does not directly mention the word 'crisis', leaves little doubt about the prevalence of a crisis: "… the DP saw the killing of farmers as representing dramatic evidence of the almost total breakdown of law and order in this country …" (*Herald* 31/8/1998: 2).

There is no evidence of a conspiracy between the organisations. I believe that there was a strong competition between the political parties to champion the rights of the

'nation', particularly as the period, August 1998, was close to the 1999 general elections. The only common ground between them, and which informs their view of the crime, is their 'privileged' social position. My explanation of this confluence of opinion draws from Frederickse et al's (1989) assertion that everybody belongs to a particular class and every class has a certain way of looking at the world.

As a result of the domination of the discourse by the specified organisations, the universe of news about 'farm killings' coincides with their views. However, it is true that they are not the only 'participants'. As I mentioned earlier, the media principle of 'objectivity' presupposes that 'both sides of the story' be covered. Consequently, on various occasions the 'consensual view' of the killings is disrupted. For example former Minister of Agriculture, Derek Hanekom, is reported to have 'blamed the killings on income disparities, bad relationships and poor co-operation between farmers and farm labourers'. This led to a strong disapproval of this view. In an editorial the *Herald* wrote:

> "Clearly, there is a huge exasperation with Agriculture Minister Derek Hanekom after his comments about bad relations on farms and income disparities [which he reportedly linked to the killings]" (12/8/1998)

There is no mention of who feels exasperated and why. The statement just stands on its own, but that says nothing about its ideological effectiveness.

A DP spokesperson said:
> "… suggestions by Mr Hanekom that farmers should improve relations were an insult to the farming community…" (*Herald* 12/8/1998).

There is no mention about how Mr Hanekom's statement 'insults' the 'farming community'. The *Herald* carried an article the following day headlined:

Hanekom's 'insult' slated

(*Herald* 13/8/1998).

The article itself is at best a tautological piece quoting the same 'DP spokesperson'. In the same issue there is an un-attributed statement which reads:

> "The decision to meet [an 'expected' meeting between the government, the FF and the SAAU] came a day after politicians and farmers slammed Mr Hanekom for his hostile response to a call on farmers to boycott tax payments until government tackled crime"

In spite of a pointedly critical response to Mr Hanekom's position, he is not called upon to substantiate what the *Herald* called his 'contribution to *a public* debate (*Herald* 13/8/1998). Neither is there any substantiation of the criticism against Mr Hanekom.

If we were to briefly interrogate the *Herald*'s definition of the 'farm killings' discourse as a 'public debate', several questions arise. Just how 'public' is this 'public debate'? Who is implicated in the term 'public'? Is there a correspondence between that relationship and the content of the 'debate'? The point here is that by his reported 'definition' of the 'farm killings', Mr Hanekom disrupted the enduring consensus. The discourse has always consistently assumed that all is well on the farms and that the 'only' threat to the 'calm' comes from the 'senseless' killings. The social conditions on the farms were never an issue. The 'farm killings' were a law and order problem. The central message in the discourse is, using Hall et al's (1981) words, to the 'guardians of modern morality' – the government and police - to act, and to act fast to restore 'normality'.

What the argument here says is that the consistent participation by certain agencies and organisations in the discourse ensures that the consensus around 'farm killings' is established, maintained, safeguarded and legitimised. While there is a 'variety of opinion' by different peoples and organisations, there is a clear lack of polarity in the viewpoints expressed – indicative of a 'consensus'.

Another area where the consensus manifests itself is in the view of crime. Crime is not seen from a social position, for instance what hunger, despondency and destitution can make of people, but the focus is localised to the crime, as a crime. Let us now see how this is effected in the *Herald* stories.

1.3.6   Angles and style in the stories – the view of crime

I have already discussed the various ways in which the 'farm killings' headlines are equipped to perform the task of drawing the attention of the readers to the articles. In this sense the headlines were an important carrier of story angles. The headlines employ different linguistic strategies to signal the angles depending on what issues they want to foreground or highlight. This is the theme of this section. It builds on our earlier discussion on headlines in that, here I broaden the focus to include the articles themselves – identifying the dominant perspectives within them, and not only in the headline.

A few identifiable angles in the 'farm killings' discourse command the field. These include violence, tragedy, blood, heart-rending interviews, economic implications of the crime, law and order breakdown, irrationality of the crime, morality and racism. The way in which these angles are developed is significant. For example an article would take a simple crime story and sensationalise it through tracking down the relatives of the victim/s, pry into their personal grief and provide excess details geared to shock or frighten. The details supplied in several articles seem to defy the principle of brevity and conciseness in news writing. The principle of brevity, however, applies in other murder stories appearing alongside the 'farm killings' stories. One 'farm killings' story even mentioned that a victim 'was praying when he was killed'. The *Herald*'s preferred style in the reportage of the 'farm killings' adopts a populist, demotic tabloid character. The

articles are presented in a way aimed at soliciting a particular response, employing

vulgarism and excess detail to achieve this. Cameron (1996) argues that linguistic indices

of affect include direct second person address and a moralistic vocabulary. One headline

reads:

> ### Police fear *terrified* victims *were still alive as they were set alight*
> ### *Grisly* **farm murders**
> (Emphasis added) (*Herald* 10/8/1998)

Another reads:

> ### Son lucky to be alive after farm attack
> ### *'They* **shot day in his** *sick bed'*
> (Emphasis added) (*Herald* 31/8/1998)

The choice of this style is not coincidental nor is it purposeless. It is peculiar to the

coverage of the 'farm killings' and thus, the discourse around it. It is chosen for its

potential productiveness of ideological effects since savagery is closely aligned with

blackness. I have made this point in our analysis of racism in the articles.

In the analysis of the editorials, I pointed to the logical impoverishment of the

expositions. The same conclusion can be reached with regards to the news articles. In

many respects the articles are wanting in their 'professional role' – informing and

educating the readers. The stories appear to be more of drama than news. There is hardly

any critical explanation of the 'farm killings' problem. While the stories foreground gory

details of the killings, there is no attempt in the follow-ups to probe and try to understand

the motivations for the violence. The assumption seems to be that there is no explanation

for the crime, it's just pure barbarism. This in spite of several suggestions of possible

alternative explanations which I will discuss below. The 'farm killings' articles, which

often appear on the front page, seem to delight in insulting black people as being

unthinking and violent by nature, thereby sustaining key stereotypes and racist attitudes.

As the in the 'headlines' section indicates, there are commercial benefits

emanating from this approach. In newspapers, language is chosen to create a relationship

with a particular group of imagined readers and just as importantly, advertisers – is a

marker of identity and social differentiation – the newspapers own 'public idiom'

(Cameron 1996; Hall et al 1981). The 'farm killings' reportage plays on the fears and

prejudices of whites to create an audience. This relatively wealthy, educated audience

provides enough advertising revenue the paper needs to survive.

1.3.7   The blindspot of the *Herald*'s 'farm killings' discourse

I have discussed how the *Herald's* news discourse on 'farm killings' came to be

structured. I looked at what became important in the reportage, how it was elevated to

that status, how the 'farm killings' came to be defined, and how that mode was sustained.

The angles and focus in the discourse were however not *the* only available angles and

focus. There were potential alternatives to the dominant definitions which, I argue, were

marginalised and eliminated. Here I look for these alternatives and the search is localised

within the parameters of the discourse.

1.3.7.1   Labour relations, social conditions and human rights issues

I have continuously referred to reactions to Mr Hanekom's statement which linked the

killings to 'bad relations on farms and income disparities'. There are several examples of

other definitions of the 'farm killings' which were marginalised.

Example *8
> The attacker, a lone gunman, believed to be former employee *seeking
> revenge,* was still at large last night despite a massive manhunt involving
> helicopters.   (Emphasis added) (*Herald* 10/8/1998)

Example *9

One shop owner in the district, who preferred not to be named, told the
Herald of his disgust at the attack.
He said he believed that the suspect was an employee on the farm and that *he
had a dispute over money with the farmer.*   (*Herald* 10/8/98)

Example *10
A report by a commission set up by the former Pres. Mandela states that the
farm attacks were "*revenge attacks.*"   (Emphasis added) (*Herald* 15/8/1998)

We have see the strategies through which Hanekom's statement was dealt with – the use
of quotation marks to downgrade it, the 'loud chorus of disapproval', the labelling of his
statement as an 'insult' and, the purported 'exasperation with him' over his statement. All
these reactions are not accompanied by evidence to support their oppositional claims.
They however, receive favourable treatment in the discourse. Mr. Hanekom, despite the
drawn disapproval of his comments is never called upon to substantiate his claims.

The above examples were treated in a similar fashion. Example *8, for instance,
does not have a subject or the reasons for the belief. Revenge, according to the Oxford
Dictionary, is a deliberate punishment or injury inflicted *in return* for what one has
suffered. Following this therefore, the quotation in the article leaves important
information out of the story and we are unable to assess the extent of the 'suffering'
which led to the 'revenge'. At the very end of the story is a glimpse of what the 'revenge'
could have been about – 'a dispute over money with the farmer' (see Example *9). This
fleeting reference to an unexplained 'dispute' does not help the reader much as it does not
state what the 'dispute over money' really refers to. Obscured at the end of the gory story,
phrased in passive self-effacing language, the statement does not do justice to the
'revenge' claim. Example *10 suggests an existence of an official report on the killings.
There is however, no analysis of its content by the paper. Any 'discussion' of it in the
editorials is at best impoverished, uninformed and un-informing.

The above arguments point to a marginalisation of alternative definitions of the 'farm killings'. In spite of their apparent importance, both as 'causes' and 'context', there is no engagement with the socio-economic conditions on the farms. The articles are quiet about a 'system' which fosters an existence of "informal settlements with high unemployment rate and where residents are exposed to poor economic conditions" and a "farming community [which] have a greater tendency of storing large cash amounts in their homes" (see CIAC report p.5).

1.3.7.2   Black farm workers as victims in the 'farm killings'

All, but one, of the subjects of the *Herald*'s 'farm killings' discourse are white. This is in spite of the CIAC report which refers to a 'constant' targeting of black farmers and work force. These other primary subjects of the killings do not feature in the discourse. Where they make a rare appearance, they are treated as 'outsiders' (see chapter five).

1.3.7.3   Government security initiatives

The chairman of the East Cape Agricultural Union, Mr P. Erasmus, was quoted saying:

> "*All* South Africans are being held to ransom by murderers and criminals and *our system clearly does not work*. We need a *system* that does…"
> "We deal with [crime] reactively, by making arrests and calling that success."
> That is not success. Success is when the murders don't take place."
> "Mr Erasmus said *the issue wasn't just about attacks on farmers and farm workers, but about crime in general in South Africa*." (*Herald* 29/8/98: 1-2)

The above quotation places crime in a wider, more inclusive context. It introduces new areas of focus – treating the killings not as a novelty but as products of 'a failing system'. In this regard it constitutes a notable departure from the usual 'farm killings' discourse with its focus on law and order. This definition however 'ended' with the quote and there is no further mention of its content in the subsequent reportage or editorialising on the

'farm killings'. There is no discussion of the government strategy or initiatives in the face of the 'national crisis' brought about by the crime. Instead it is the DP, a political party that gets benign publicity about its 'plan to end the killings' as we have seen.

The elimination and marginalisation of the foregoing competing definitions from the 'farm killings' discourse does not happen accidentally. The discourse is characterised by an ideological consensus. The competing definitions tended to disrupt this 'consensus'. Their elimination served a fundamental ideological purpose - creating a picture of things as uncontroversial and unequivocal. Central to the alternatives quoted here, are 'issues'– social relations, a social system – which require research understand. The discourse tended to focus on dramatic events with high news values. Accounts of these events are freely available and readily supplied by several agencies and organisations.

1.4 Conclusion to the analyses

The central argument in the foregoing analysis of editorials and news articles is that there is very little 'neutrality', 'balance', or 'objectivity' in the August 1998 'farm killings' discourse in the *Herald*. The picture created in and, by the discourse is a highly structured one, resulting from both conscious and unconscious selections by the authors, editors and publishers of the stories. It is a complex multidimensional picture that escapes any concise representation. As a general approximation however, it is a picture of innocent, hard-working, economically productive but defenceless whites, being killed by savage, senseless blacks in circumstances of lawlessness and anarchy. This is what the *Herald*'s 'farm killings' discourse is: a socially located way of making a particular sense of the problem of deaths of people on the farms

The 'farm killings' brought the 'wrong' issues (violence, hatred) into sensational focus, while at the same time effectively hiding and mystifying the deeper causes. Larger questions about gross social inequities were circumvented. The attribution of a new label 'farm killings' lifted the phenomenon out of the category of the 'run-of-the-mill' stories and sustained it as a 'newsworthy' phenomenon. It became possible to abstract the 'farm killings' stories from a bigger picture of murder crimes, events and issues both on the farms where they happened, as well as in the country. The episodic coverage treats the 'farm killings' in isolation, as 'novelties', thus ignoring the analysis of the entire system. The editorials, despite the general principles of their 'functions', provide no recourse to compensate for this inadequacy. Using insufficiently analytical language, while simultaneously re-articulating the language in the news discourse, they provide an example of an antithesis to even basic analysis. Their 'analysis' of the 'farm killings' and mooted solutions in the discourse are localised within the current social system. What the discourse seems to suggest is that solutions are within reach if only, for example, the government were to enforce law and order more firmly. Indeed the structural organisation of newspapers precludes in-depth investigations and lengthy research from being done, as I discuss in our preamble to the analysis of the editorials. However an understanding of these severe limitations is important to assist an understanding of the false patina of the media-generated consensus, and a view of issues as being uncontroversial.

The discourse's thinly veiled 'racist' approach to the crime provides ample evidence of the ideological nature of the media's claims to social responsibility and objectivity, or at the very least a case of dereliction of responsibility. The reportage consistently took its cues from a variety of carefully selected white sources expressing,

articulating and re-articulating a peculiar sentiment and perspective. In the end the news

ideology in the discourse is shaped by these articulations. The discourse orchestrates a

racist theory that 'black' equals crime, thoughtlessness, savagery, while 'white' is

associated with productivity, family values, and civilisation. The overall discourse - its

language, focus and style tends to construct and legitimatise, if not perpetuate, a

particular historical social reality, namely, that black life is cheap, and white lives matter.

How 'nation' is invoked in the discourse reveals its hegemonic objective. In one

instance 'nation' is used as an exclusive reference to whites and in another it is implicates

everyone in support of a particular interest. Explaining this, Hall et al assert that:

> In producing their definition of social reality, and place of ordinary people
> within it, they [dominant ideas] construct a particular image of society which
> represents particular class interests as the interests of all members of society.
> Because of their control over material and mental resources, and their
> domination of the major institutions in society, this class's definition of the
> social world provide the basic rationale for those institutions which protect
> and reproduce their way of life. (1981: 59)

At the heart of Hall's statement, lies the basis and the thrust of the 'farm killings'

discourse in the *Herald*'s August 1998 'news' articles from the point of view of

this analysis.

Chapter 6

Conclusion to the Study

1. Conclusion

This study has attempted to examine the *construction* of the 'farm killings' discourse in the *Herald*'s articles published in August 1998. It did so through an in-depth and a theoretically informed engagement with the discourse. It is a case study and does not seek to make any generalisations regarding news production based on the conclusions reached. Its main value is to be found in its insights and observations which could facilitate a better understanding of the journalistic practice. The major point of its examination of the discourse is a discursive one, which is difficult to capture in simple isolated sentences with justification. Hence, what this conclusion aims to do is to highlight the thrust of this study albeit, in a highly abridged manner.

The attention given to the 'farm killings' by the country's newspapers, and by the *Herald* in particular, shows that this was a major news story. The production of four editorials on the subject within the same month was in itself evidence of this presumed newsworthiness. Earlier on in this study, a point was made regarding the mixed reactions by different people to the 'farm killings' reports. The cited claims of racial bias in news reportage by Premier Stofile seem to indicate this ambivalence. These claims give rise to key questions and concerns which reach to the heart of the journalistic profession. These relate to key principles and assumptions regarding the practice of journalism. To examine these concerns, the cultural studies perspective as major area of media studies provided both powerful and relevant conceptual insights for their examination.

Prior to the examination of the newspaper texts, chapter 2 outlined a sociological perspective on the country's press as a background to the analysis. In that chapter a picture emerges of the press which is deeply implicated in the country's racist history. While this is an overview, it does suggest various ways, both overt and subtle, in which the country's press, historically, has served political objectives. It highlights the intricacies of the country's political past in which colour was a powerful definer of social location. The centrality of the press in the strategies that sustained and struggled against the social, political and economic system is outlined. This background provides insights and a framework which assist the subsequent examination of the *Herald*'s articles.

As was stated earlier, cultural studies as the theoretical framework within which this study is located, provides its emphasis. Two particularly crucial concepts emanate from this perspective, namely: news construction and ideology. These concepts brought two important issues into focus. First, was the view of news as a *re*presentation, a *construction*, as opposed to the dominant view of news as a reflection of reality. Secondly, was the pervasiveness of ideology not only in language, but also in major journalistic claims (objectivity, accuracy etc) and practices (news production and structure etc.). Consequently this study discusses the 'farm killings' discourse not as a truthful, disinterested reflection of the experience on the farms, but as a socially located construction of an experience which was given the label 'farm killings'. This enabled this study to examine three broad areas of the 'farm killings' discourse: what constituted the 'farm killings', how the articles on the 'farm killings' were constructed, and what the ideological inflection and significance of the 'farm killings' discourse were.

The analyses in the final two chapters sought to explain why the 'farm killings' discourse became a particular representation of the murder on the farms. Key concluding remarks were made within those chapters and will not be repeated here. What follows is a broad reflection on the examination of the discourse. What the analyses did among other things, was challenge the media's 'Fourth Estate' claims. What emerges was that the discourse, far from being a 'reflection' of happening on the farms, became an ideologically loaded construction that gave meaning to the experience. A key feature of this construction is the racism that became indelibly sewn into the discourse. Also central to this construction is an effort to influence, in complex ways, how the experiences of the people on the farms came to be understood, as well as the orientation of the readers towards the subjects of the 'farm killings' discourse. It helps to look at the mediation of the 'farm killings' by the *Herald* against the backdrop of chapter two. The discourse provides no evidence of a departure from the key observations made in that chapter regarding the behaviour of the country's racially defined 'White Press'. Several observations can be made in this regard.

One of these is the discourse's exclusive concern with the political, economic and social life of the white section of the population. As the analysis argues, there are several significant omissions in the 'farm killings' discourse. These include a racially defined section of the victims of the farm murders, as well as the conditions and context within which the murders took place. The discourse, thus, became an 'exclusive' and ideologically loaded representation of the suffering of the white subjects of the murders, rather than a broader, racially inclusive and contextualised experience. The *Herald*'s 'farm killings' label became a reference to a racially defined section of the subjects of the

farm killings – the white victims. The paper's mediation of the killings is significantly resonant with apartheid capitalism, racial domination and subjugation. The discourse omitted, trivialized and downplayed perspectives that might threaten the economic interest of its largely white readership. Black experience and concerns were marginalized or represented in a truncated and simplistic manner. There is a deep sedimentation of the apartheid era modus operandi and thought in the *Herald'*s mediation of the killings.

The 'farm killings' became a way to facilitate popular consent to the existing economic structure which disadvantages blacks, to the values which support and underwrite it, and played a crucial role in ensuring its continuity of existence. To achieve this, the focus of the discourse either became too restricted or fell on the 'wrong' issues (violence and brutality rather that the structural basis of violence). The crime was removed from its social base as a product of the capitalist social organisation, and constructed to indicate the personal 'inadequacy' of the perpetrators. The discourse is fraught with evidence of a racist politicisation of the experience and attempts to lend a patina of public interest and opposition to a restricted view of a criminal activity.

That is what 'farm killings' became – a simple racist crime committed by blacks against whites. Blacks were constructed as criminals helped by a conniving government with the white 'nation' under attack. From this analysis, the 'farm killings' discourse in the *Herald* is located in, and takes its cues from, the white landscape. It 'reflects', and contributes to a climate where black lives are seen as cheap, the murder of blacks tolerable and not worthwhile to protest, and where the murder of a white person is inherently newsworthy, costly in both human and economic terms, unacceptable and an abomination.

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